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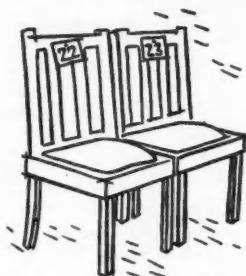
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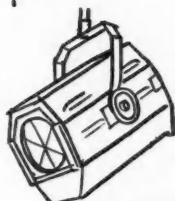
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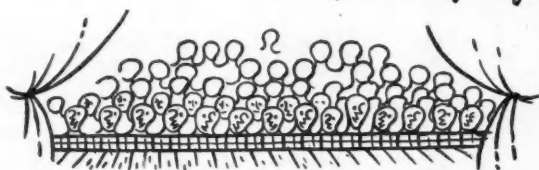
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DRAMA

The Quarterly Theatre Review

NEW SERIES

AUTUMN 1952

NUMBER 26

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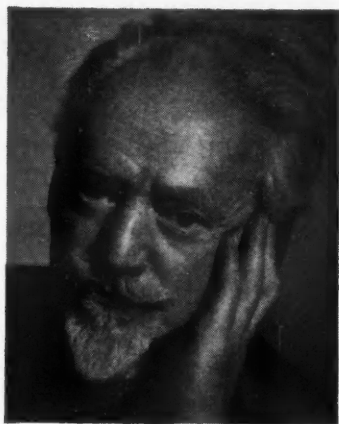
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A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION



Clifford Bax,

pictured above, begins this series of articles on Contemporary British Dramatists with

JAMES BRIDIE

BRIDIE was so prolific a playwright that it is impracticable to analyse all his plays from *The Sunlight Sonata* in 1928 to *Mr. Gillie* in 1950. Moreover, some of his minor works were little more than charades.

Many critics have pointed out that he was a ramshackle constructor and that he seldom achieved a satisfactory last act. He was also often guilty of writing a False Close or even an anti-climax so that the play might very well end many pages before the final curtain. He excused the presence of so many drunks in his work by saying that without alcohol his countrymen, unlike the Irish, are inexpressive.

The Anatomist is a fine grim play (about body-snatchers in Edinburgh, long ago). Few acts are more baleful than the scene in a low tavern when the two murderers, Burke and Hare, intoxicate and take "home" the good-natured prostitute. Their intention is to sell her dead body to the famous anatomist, Dr. Knox. Now, the first act takes place in a genteel drawing-

room where Knox is a familiar and honoured figure: and therefore makes a most effective foil to the ghastly proceedings in the tavern. But then? We go back to the drawing-room, Knox having run there to escape an infuriated mob. A number of his students also find their way in, but how could they do so if the mob is unable to follow its victim? We even hear Knox delivering an uninterrupted lecture on anatomy: an incredible anti-climax!

It is all very well to complain, but we ought to be able to suggest a remedy. Bridie mistook his Centre of Interest. We care little about Knox and even less about the fuddled student who had aroused the prostitute's maternal instinct. It is in the prostitute herself that we have become really interested. The last act, then, should have shown her in the murderers' lair, her gradual horror as she divines their purpose, the murder, the despatch of Hare to the hospital with a promise of a fresh young corpse, and possibly some crocodile tears in Burke's eyes.

In the same year (1931) Bridie achieved his best and loveliest play, *Tobias and the Angel*. The *Times* acutely observed that the piece has obviously been written with delight, and the author's delight is infectious. Moreover, he had created a universal figure (the rarest triumph of any dramatist), a kind of apocryphal Charlie Chaplin, a little timid man (Tobias) who, urged onward by the Archangel Raphael, masters his diffidence and becomes heroic. The play is peopled by lovable semi-humorous characters, each of them an open invitation to actor or actress.

Tobias contains some of Bridie's most charming jests. Here are three:—

TOBIAS (hot and welcoming the notion of a swim): I say, you are full of good ideas, Azarias. Are you coming in, too?

RAPHAEL: No, not just now.

TOBIAS: Oh, why not?

RAPHAEL: If you must know, I have a slight abnormality in the region of my shoulder-blades. Nothing much, but I am sensitive on these matters. I always bathe alone.

RAPHAEL: Once upon a time there was a King's daughter who had eyes like two full moons, teeth like a flock of Angora goats, and cheeks like a parcel of pomegranates swimming in blood.

TOBIAS: By gum, she must have been a pretty girl.

SARA: They tell me that Nineveh is very pretty. We have a song about the Bonnie, Bonnie Banks of the Tigris."

The success of *Tobias*, added to a Scotsman's addiction to the Bible, may account for *Jonah and the Whale* (1932), which the author attempted three times, and for the slightly better *Susannah and the Elders* (1938). In *The Golden Legend of Shults* (1939) we have another play with a False Close or, as William Archer might say, "without a signpost to the road which we are to take."

Among the charades, as I have termed them, are *Marriage is no Joke* (1934), *Storm in a Teacup* (1936), *The King of Nowhere* (1938), *Babes in the Wood*, *Lancelot*, *Holy Isle*, *Mary Read*, *John Knox*, *Last Trump*, *It Depends What You Mean*, *Forrigan Reel* and *Kitchen*

Comedy. Even in *Babes* there is an Old Lady who says "Don't worry about that, dear. I like seeing people in a mess. They're only their dear delightful selves when they're in a mess." *Forrigan Reel*, a sort of ballad-opera, shows how any art-form must be carefully studied. Bridie inserted his "airs" at random.

The Sleeping Clergyman (1933) is, according to the Preface, supposed to be an Indifferent Deity. The stretch of time is from 1867 to a year in the nineteen-thirties; the play is an illustration of how disease, failure, and early death may yet produce, after two generations, a genius—in this instance the discoverer of a plague-cure. The anticipated Drunk is a medical student named Cameron who is heavily smitten by tuberculosis. Glasgow is the setting. We may well doubt whether this play will hold the stage. It is too medical but it certainly is built upon an interesting idea—that heredity may move in a mysterious way its wonders to perform.

In *The Black Eye* (1935) our friend is still experimenting—this time with soliloquies in front of the curtain; and the soliloquiser himself is the Bridie Drunk. The defects in this play are, first, that the personalities are merely life-size and therefore not arresting in the theatre; secondly, that about half-way there is an immense conversation which entirely stalls the action. Even *Mr. Bolfry* (1943) does not fully succeed. It opens too slowly, and the minister—McCrimmon—makes an early entrance but goes out again so soon that he has little chance of, as actors say, "establishing" himself. A much worse flaw is that, once Mr. Bolfry, who is the devil, arrives he swamps McCrimmon. No character can compete with the Devil. It is Mr. Bolfry, this time, who is the Drunk.

In *Dr. Angelus* (1947) Bridie worked harder. Here, in fact, is a play which he was able to finish effectively. It is a study of a doctor who quietly murders both his mother-in-law and his wife. Angelus is portrayed superbly—as, in

fact, a retrotype of Shakespeare's Angelo, the man who was almost good. "She is now safe in Abraham's bosom," he says, adding "Let us hope that she is comfortable."

We come now, with regret, to Bridie's last two plays, *Daphne Laureola* (1949) and *Mr. Gillie* (1950). In the former play Daphne herself is the Drunk. She is married to a fine old gentleman, aged eighty-seven, who employs a chauffeur to get the lady home when she indulges in one of her outbreaks. At a café, possibly in Soho, she surprises the other occupants by musing aloud about her life and temperament. Presently she has asked all of them—young people, spivs, a Fat Gentleman and an enamoured Pole—to come to tea with her after a day or two. Confiding in the

Pole she says, "An hundred generations, the leaves of autumn, have dropped into the grave. And again we shiver miserably in the confines of a long winter, as Christendom and the Roman Empire did hundreds of years ago. Again and again and again we have covered the face of the earth with order and loveliness and a little justice. But only the face of it. Deep down below, the subterranean brutes have bided their time to shake down our churches and palaces and let loose the little rats to sport among the ruins." Bridie seldom wrote so fine and solemn a passage.

When the day for the tea-party arrives Daphne has forgotten all the invitations, thus bringing about a situation pregnant with comedy and



"OH! DID THIS"

was the signature used by O. H. Mavor (James Bridie) for his many sketches. We reproduce (1) A tragic policeman, (2) Prophecy on a friend's arrival in London, (3) Sir Walter Raleigh: "This cloak is no longer fit to wear."

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inevitably entertaining in the theatre: but the surprise and peak of the play is the close of Act Three when, so unexpectedly, old Sir Joseph dies.

DAPHNE: What's the matter with you, Joe?

SIR JOSEPH: Death, me dear. Just death. The first natural thing that has happened to me for half a century.

DAPHNE: Where are your tablets? (*calling*) Vincent! Vincent! Come quickly . . . Oh, Joe, don't go. I need you!

SIR JOSEPH: Do you, sweetheart? That's not so bad then.

Unfortunately this is one of Bridie's false closes. He cannot reawaken our interest in the comedy characters, and his device of bringing all of them by chance to the café of Act One is stretching coincidence to absurdity.

In *Mr. Gillie* we have a distinct and new stage-character: a school-master in a remote part of Scotland who believes that all his geese are swans. The Drunk this time is the local doctor. It is amusing to find a passage in which one

of the prodigal geese exclaims, "What good does he think it does knowing . . . that a play's got a beginning, a middle, and an end? Any theatre-fireman could tell you that by looking at a play — unless it stopped in the middle, the way a lot of the best ones do!"

What shall we think of him, how shall we estimate him, now that he will write no more? Mr. Trewin rightly says that Bridie and Priestley were the main supports of the London Theatre during the nineteen-thirties. This, however, does not imply that much of Bridie's work will survive. He seldom looked where he was going, and his one play that seems destined to long life is *Tobias and the Angel*.

These plays are essentially the work of a physician. They have humour; better still, they have wide-spreading "humanity": attributes much to be desired (and frequently found) in a doctor.

THEATRE IN MOSCOW

by Myril Pitt

Miss Pitt went to Moscow for the International Economic Conference in April 1952. She acted as Secretary to the British delegation which included Lord Boyd-Orr and five M.P.s. She won one of the League's Original Play Awards in 1947 with "The Puppet Show" (Deane).

I RECENTLY had occasion to visit Moscow in connection with my work and, while there, naturally seized the opportunity of seeing as much as possible of the Russian Theatre.

Outstanding, of course, among the sixty or so theatres in Moscow, and most renowned, is the Bolshoi, where ballet and opera are played on alternate evenings. It is an exciting experience to join the great jostling crowd which, just before eight o'clock, surges through the magnificent pillared entrance to the theatre. The most expensive seats are in the stalls and cost 33 roubles (roughly 16s.). Box seats are slightly cheaper. There is tremendous demand for seats and I was told by a British Embassy official that queuing begins at six in the morning, two tickets only being allotted

to each person. Inside, the auditorium of the Bolshoi is reminiscent of our own Covent Garden Opera House, ornately decorated in red and gold, and with twelve tiers of boxes round three sides.

The performance begins at eight o'clock and usually ends just before midnight. During the long intervals people promenade round the circular gallery with its photographs of the opera and ballet stars; or partake of wine, minerals, ice cream, and snacks in the restaurant. Evening dress is not worn and there is very little jewellery, but everybody without exception leaves their outdoor clothes in one of the numerous cloakrooms. Many people change into lighter shoes if it is winter and they have arrived in boots. It is unheard of for anyone to enter the auditorium wearing a hat and coat.

We attempted it once when we arrived late and the orchestra was already tuning up, but the attendant directed us very firmly to the nearest cloakroom. I was amused to see the row of typically Russian fur hats on the shelf in the cloakroom, men's and women's both alike. Smoking is absolutely forbidden in any theatre auditorium and we saw very little even in the intervals.

The ballet, of course, is the most superb manifestation of Russian culture, and we were fortunate in seeing Ulanova dancing Juliet. In *Sleeping Beauty*, the first night of a new production, we saw Lepishinskaya, officially considered to be second to Ulanova, but to many of us just as entrancing. Whereas Ulanova moves with the grace and motion of a cloud, Lepishinskaya in contrast may be compared to the light, darting swiftness of a butterfly. It is impossible adequately to capture in words the full glory of the dancing and of the sets and lighting. The Bolshoi has an enormous revolving stage, which was used to good effect in *Sleeping Beauty* when the Prince's voyage by boat to the enchanted castle drew burst upon burst of applause. Commencing with flat, low-lying meadows, where willow trees drooped over the water, the scenery gradually changed to purple, clouded heights, crowned with the castle and set against the sunset; all to the accompaniment of Tchaikovsky's music, superbly played by the great orchestra.

Another scene comes to mind—the banquet scene in *Romeo and Juliet* (Prokofiev's music), when the full depth of the stage was used, mysteriously lighted by candles in branched holders, the feasting going on on a raised dais far back, and the dancers whirling in the foreground. And again I remember the scene at the tomb when Romeo ascended the steps, holding the body of Juliet high above him, apparently balancing her on one hand. The size of the Bolshoi stage may be judged by the fact that in the street scene just prior to the duel between Mercutio

and Tybalt, a religious procession passing by was on the stage at the same time as two bands. The death of Tybalt was something to be remembered. As the people gathered round him he seemed to make a tremendous effort to stand upright, and the crowd in perfect unison swayed back, then slowly he collapsed and again the crowd swayed tensely forward, by their combined strength seemingly willing him to rise. It was a beautifully timed piece of production.

There is a great deal of "acting" in Russian ballet, more than is customary in English classical dancing, and in *Romeo and Juliet* over and over again the miming was such that the words of the play echoed in my mind. I remember particularly Romeo's leave-taking of Juliet:—

Look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

Applause is frequent. Every tricky step, every spectacular setting is excitedly applauded, sometimes even cheered. At the final curtain of *Romeo and Juliet* the audience rose spontaneously to its feet and began cheering, clapping and stamping. This went on without pause and was still continuing when we left nearly half an hour later.

Some of Moscow's theatres are attached to factory clubs. At these Palaces of Culture, which cater not only for workers at the factory and their families but also for people in the district, every type of hobby and recreation is available. Despite the somewhat forbidding name, they are companionable, well-equipped places. The one I visited was attached to the Stalin Autocar Works, and the dramatic society was busily engaged in rehearsing *Romeo and Juliet*, perhaps inspired by the Bolshoi Ballet.

At the time of my visit plays being performed at Moscow theatres included *Pygmalion*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *Much Ado About Nothing* (beautifully produced and acted). *Othello* and *The Apple*

Cart had been played not long before. We were interested to see how the famous line in *Pygmalion* would get across. It was translated as "The devil I'm not," and still brought the house down. I asked to see a modern Russian play and was taken to the Soviet Army Theatre where the Stalin Prize Play *Unforgettable 1919* was being performed. It dealt with the siege of Petrograd, and principal characters were Lenin and Stalin. The actors playing these parts were made up to look uncannily like their real life counterparts. Here again the production was exceedingly well done, though the play itself did not impress me.

But the children's theatre which we visited was wholly enchanting. There are four children's theatres in Moscow, but whereas the other three give shows for children only, this one gives performances for children in the daytime and grown-ups in the evening. The plays at this theatre were performed with stick puppets and the production I saw (*She Loves Me—She Loves Me Not*) had a collective farm as its setting and ended up with the agricultural show in Moscow. Here again the sets and lighting were exquisite, and the puppets were so lifelike that I had to keep reminding myself that they were not

flesh and blood actors. Such incidents as a small boy climbing over a back wall seemed quite "unpuppet-like." There was one fascinating scene where the Moscow-bound train seemed to be tearing along at a tremendous rate. This was achieved by a cyclorama with flying clouds and the jolting motion of the carriages. At the end of the play the men and women who had manipulated the puppets, attired in blouses and blue dungarees, came on with the puppets to take their bow. At this same theatre there was an exhibition of puppets gathered from all over the world, and very sinister some of them were, too, notably the Eastern ones.

The theatre is very much alive and flourishing in Moscow. There are far fewer cinemas than in London, and all types of people flock to the theatres. One of the interpreters had been several times to England and the United States, and in talking with her of Russian ballet and English Shakespearean acting, of Ulanova and Gielgud, of the Bolshoi and the Old Vic, we met on common ground, forgetting, temporarily at any rate, our countries' differences. Truly, it is easy for those with common interests to forget international tensions."

THE TWO ANTIGONES

by Evan John

THOSE of us who are lucky enough to live in South Oxfordshire had an extra piece of luck this July. Pure chance enabled us to see Anouilh's modern *Antigone* produced by an excellent repertory company at the 100-year-old Kenton theatre in Henley-on-Thames (beautifully redecorated by Mr. John Piper), and, in the same week, Sophocles' masterpiece of the same name acted by the schoolboys of Bradfield under the 100-million-year-old sky. A unique and a most exciting artistic experience.

German Occupation, and French Resistance to it, naturally attracted M. Anouilh's attention to the theme. It needed little modernisation. The ruthless tyrant of an ancient Greek city decreed that the dead body of a pretender to his throne should lie unburied, in the sight of gods and men; he had to kill the sister of that pretender when she defied his will by giving it funeral honours. A modern Dictator, finishing a blood-purge by leaving the corpse of his principal opponent exposed to public view, is forced to order one

more execution (unfortunately of a female) in order to intimidate public opinion and ensure the authority of the State against the inconvenient idealism of the Individual. Words, costumes, timing, theatrical conventions, dramatic construction—all these have altered unrecognisably in the 2,392 years (we have the exact date) since the first production of Sophocles's *Antigone*. Human Nature, its aspirations and cynicisms, its self-righteousness and self-sacrifices, have not altered one jot.

After seeing M. Anouilh's slick and ingenious play on the modern version of the theme one naturally feared that Sophocles's ancient masterpiece, next day, would spell two hours of polite boredom. The fear was unjustified.

There were certainly points on which M. Anouilh scored. He made some clearer, at least to a modern audience. He exploited little twists of plot and characterisation which Sophocles had missed, or unwisely disdained. He rightly and artistically emphasised what Professor Freud would have put into scientific and less exciting terms: "These people, in middle age, do what they do and speak as they speak because, as children, they were thus and thus." This skilful persistence in the obvious was carried to great lengths, until there was a feeling that M. Anouilh was perhaps dotting too many "i"s and crossing an unnecessary number of "t"s. Nevertheless, it seemed likely that this sincere and *actual* modern play would make the older one, acted in a language that has been dead for twenty centuries, seem pompous and tedious.

It was neither. One was doubtful about one thing only—the Chorus. Skilfully handled by the producer, Mr. Cecil Bellamy, its first appearance was excellent . . . a welcome relief to the overpowering tension on the main stage. One was glad of these impressive old men, repeating poetry in unison, before the strain imposed by the next turn in the tragic story. One ended, on their later interludes, by hoping that

these silly old donkeys would soon stop posturing and reciting, and let the play proceed. The problem was set by the artistic and liturgical traditions of long-dead Greek gentlemen, and there is probably no solution acceptable to a modern audience.

Apart from the insoluble Chorus-problem, the amateur production of the ancient masterpiece was utterly and rightly different from that of its modern imitation. The Bradfield schoolboys would probably have made a sad mess of M. Anouilh's clever actualities. The Henley professionals could hardly have made the lines of Sophocles as telling and as impressive as simplicity and sincerity made them. Each play got the treatment its author would have desired.

The world-wide reputation of the older play was vindicated—if only in one vital particular, if only on the last lap. M. Anouilh, addressing his audience through a very modern and sophisticated individual Chorus, told us that the beauty of tragedy lay in its wholesome inevitability; that, given certain characters and a certain situation, certain other things must inescapably happen. So spake M. Anouilh, but never justified his words. Right up to the end we felt that Antigone's *fiancé* might easily organise a last-minute rescue-party to save her; that the Dictator's S.S.-men (replacing the minions of the ancient tyrant) might stage a sit-down mutiny rather than carry out the repugnant order for putting a woman to death; that the people of Thebes might raise an impromptu Resistance Movement, sweep away the abomination of their government, and make hay of the story and its "inevitability."

M. Anouilh is a very good dramatist. But Sophocles was a supreme one. He made no song-and-dance about "inevitability," telling us what was about to happen, and why. He just made it happen. As the play drew towards its terrible close we knew that no other close had ever been possible. Once a self-willed ruler had decided to issue

a certain decree which he could not safely retract, once a half-idealistic, half-morbid young woman had decided that it was her duty to defy it, then the whole pattern of doom was bound to engulf tyrant and rebel, his reluctant soldiers and her desperate lover, in exactly that fate which ancient legend records and modern Totalitarianism has so curiously re-emphasised. Life

was like that, on this planet, twenty-five centuries ago. Life is like that to-day, with no escape, no recompense . . . on this side the grave. But the ancient pagan was more successful than the modern Existentialist in hinting at what neither was so foolish as to state outright, that there are things more important than life on this planet, perhaps things beyond the grave.

PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

by J. W. Lambert

LOOKING back over the theatre in London during the second quarter of the year, I thought to myself "Really a rather uninteresting patch"; then, after a moment, "Still, there was excellent acting in *Winter Journey*, and *Hobson's Choice* was delightful; and what about Adrienne Allen in *The Vortex* and Martin Miller in *Sweet Madness*? Then *Timon of Athens* was interesting, too. Surely you haven't already forgotten Katherine Hepburn's fireworks? Or *Dragon's Mouth*?"

Remembering nervously the discomfiture of those critics who exclaimed that Shaw's plays were not plays at all, I shall warily avoid the point in dealing with *Dragon's Mouth*, merely suggesting, if pressed, that a play is any piece of dialogue which succeeds in the theatre. This debate on life and human personality contained some good prose, but no poetry and very little wit, and there was nothing particularly original about its ideas; yet it made a stimulating evening. The odd thing, as it seems to me, is that the four players, lined up in evening dress before microphones thinly disguised as a ship's rail, were at their best where the writing seemed least at home with its theme. Michael Denison, quick and nervous, made a very credible figure of a rather stereotyped aesthete; Dulcie Gray did equally well by the woman who has lived by and for the pleasures of the senses, although hers is a cool beauty and her speeches

suggested a rather intellectual conception of sensuous delights. On the other hand, Rosamund John, as a career woman, allowed the muddled motives of the character she played to infect her presentation, and Norman Wooland, saturninely swaying and reverberantly baying, suggested a noble savage rather than a ruthless business man with a keen grasp of the demands of the material world. Yet in spite of all qualifications, the piece was always interesting and sometimes moving. Have J. B. Priestley and Jacquetta Hawkes developed a new and exciting form of drama? I very much doubt it; and I tremble to think of the desert wastes of dullness opened up to less skilful explorers.

First among the new plays of a more orthodox kind I must reluctantly put Clifford Odets' *Winter Journey*. "Show business trying hard to be theatre," says the young producer, of the play in which he is trying to bring back a drunk who was once a great actor; and the phrase will do very well to describe *Winter Journey* itself. The psychology of the piece will not bear close examination: but it does provide three fine acting parts, all excellently done. Michael Redgrave as the broken-down actor builds up a portrait of remarkable consistency; weakness is subtly expressed in his ravaged face, his hand-dog bravado, and the half-hearted shrug of his broad shoulders; and his big

moments of total breakdown are felt with a blood-curdling chill. Googie Withers, as his tired and disillusioned wife, abandons her beauty; pushing out her under-lip and her hips simultaneously, she perfectly conveys the possessive contempt which keeps her going. Sam Wanamaker, who plays the producer (and did, in fact, produce this play), bounces round the stage, tough, angry, determined, living on his nerves, like a trainer trying to whip on a cowardly boxer.

Winter Journey is certainly worth seeing once, for the sake of its acting; but even Alec Guinness's charming virtuosity is poor consolation for the *longueurs* of another American play, *Under the Sycamore Tree*. The idea of a colony of ants reflecting the follies of mankind can hardly provide material for a full-length play, and here the butter is spread very thin. Unfortunately, too, Eric Linklater's *The Mortimer Touch*, not very happily cast, proved a singularly tasteless piece of Edinburgh rock, although to complain that it is no more than a rehash of *The Alchemist* is quite beside the point; many of the world's finest plays are rehashes of something else.

After My Fashion is in its way a remarkable work, for it includes more dramatic and verbal clichés than one would have thought possible. In the process, unfortunately, it wastes what might have been a good idea: should a woman who knows the truth break down the legend of a famous explorer?

Neither Rodney Ackland's *The Pink Room* nor Lilian Hellman's adaptation from Roblès, *Montserrat*, won promotion from the Lyric, Hammersmith, to the West End. The former was a dreadful disappointment; banal dialogue, grotesque errors of taste and judgment, and a wildly uneven performance ruined what might have been a sharp little modern morality. Hermione Baddeley as the proprietress of a drinking club—running as it were, her private hell—and David Yates, a weak-willed would-be writer, struggled

gamely to make something of it. *Montserrat* proved a cruel and rather unsatisfying play, but it did offer Noel Willman a splendid opportunity, fully taken, to present a warped and cruel soldier, limp-armed, keen-eyed, leaning forward as he carries out his relentless inquisition like a scientist awaiting the result of an experiment. Richard Burton, the object of his fury, had nothing to do but sit about looking stubborn.

In *The Young Elizabeth*, a colourful chronicle, Peggy Thorpe-Bates as Bloody Mary steals the thunder even from Mary Morris's spitfire Elizabeth. Another period piece, *The Other Heart*, James Forsyth's play about Villon, at the Old Vic, was notable only for Irene Worth, beautiful, if inclined to lean over backwards, in sweeping mediaeval clothes, and for the rat-haunted horrors of Alan Badel's ravings in a dungeon; and the much-heralded *Uranium* 235 turned out to be a prolonged sermon to the effect that war is a bad thing and science may be used for good or evil.

Sweet Madness is a pleasing example of the best sort of farcical comedy. Not as good, it is true, as *Who Goes There*, though sharing the same leading lady, Geraldine McEwan. This delicious little person, with her funny nose, and funny voice, all gasps and squeaks, is forced slightly to overplay her limited hand; but she is gallantly supported by Richard Attenborough, comically earnest, Robin Bailey, croakily flippant, and Martin Miller, who as a Central European psychiatrist gives a wonderful, almost a painful, performance, so vivid is his sketch of mental distress coupled with a strange unholy joy. Then, too, in *Dial "M" For Murder* Frederick Knott has provided a thriller of unpretentious originality, shunning noise or heroics. Emrys Jones exactly catches the bouncing nervousness, the adolescent, unformed speech of the would-be murderer by proxy.

Of the revivals, a very heavy-handed *Trelawny of the Wells* may be allowed to sink without trace; a hardly less



"NOTHING IS QUITE SO MYSTERIOUS AS A DARK THEATRE"

Googie Withers, Michael Redgrave and Sam Wanamaker in Clifford Odets's *"Winter Journey"* at the St. James's Theatre.

laboured production of Granville Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance* was remarkable only in that its lamentable last scene, the declaration of Edward and Alice, provoked jeers and interjections even within the high-minded walls of the Arts Theatre. Noel Coward's *The Vortex*, too, though respectfully received when I saw it at Hammersmith, was punctuated by misplaced titters when (a slave to duty) I saw it again at the Criterion.

Lancashire might have cavilled at the Salford accents in *Hobson's Choice* at the Arts, but the spirit of the piece was caught and held. Donald Bird presented the monstrous Hobson with tremendous solidity; Pauline Jameson, though she could have been a little more salty in speech, was a charitable chip off the old block as his rebellious daughter Maggie; best of all, Donald Pleasence's Willie Mossop, the timid but skilful little man prodded into independence by Maggie, could express more of dismay or delight by the agitation of his Adam's apple than many actors could manage with their whole body.

Lastly, if ever two principal parts cried out for what is known as "star quality" they are those of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* and Shaw's *The Millionairess*. At the Old Vic *Timon* was played (*vice* Wolfitt) by André Morell, who has not that mysterious inflation; more particularly he lacks the power of speaking verse so that it sings and soars and induces in the most recalcitrant listener the ecstasy which lifts him beyond the consideration of pros and cons. None the less his performance was all alive, and the play—not, after all, one of the best—came through with flying colours. Its first half, in *Timon's* princely home, Tyrone Guthrie made both splendid and busy—a little too busy, perhaps, especially when so many people pottered about on the forestage that the leading actors were invisible from the stalls; and amid the golden glitter *Timon's* paranoiac tendencies were not enough stressed—his insistent generosity should surely

have been made more clearly another symptom of a mind diseased, like his refusal to listen to the warnings of his steward. Leo McKern's Apemantus, the snarling philosopher, was excellently done: another aspect of his close-cropped fool in *Lear*, the very personification of a limping conscience.

Katherine Hepburn, on the other hand, clearly has any amount of "star quality"; it would be interesting to know whether she has much in the way of acting ability. Her performance as the millionairess was uneven but irresistible. The play, yet more uneven, is easily resisted, though it has some very good jokes; but never mind: whirled along in Miss Hepburn's wake, we hardly had time to bother with Shaw. She strode, she stumped, she straddled chairs, she draped herself over desks and perched on the edge of tables, she followed her quivering nose like a pointer, she flung herself down in a rage and rooted in the carpet. She sang, she croaked, she barked, she whistled, she roared—and at one point she cooed. I cannot share the general admiration for her speaking of the piece on marriage; one of Shaw's usual failures in the face of direct emotion, like Joan's remarks about nature in the trial scene, it was treated by Miss Hepburn with painful respect, rather as an inexperienced clergyman might handle a baby at the font. Nor did she attempt to control Shaw's prose; faced with a long sentence, she always made a joke of it, hammering out a relentless staccato as though she were a machine-gun; but her acting as a whole was a fine demonstration of the Life Force trying to make people love it. She was adequately supported, though hardly more; even Cyril Ritchard and Robert Helpmann found the business of making bricks without straw in an earthquake rather heavy going.

So perhaps although we saw nothing quite first-class, the theatrical quarter wasn't so uninteresting as my first thoughts suggested.

THEATRE HISTORY

by F. S. Boas

IN the 1930's, when Sir Barry Jackson was directing the Malvern Festival and I was one of his lecturers, it was my good fortune to come into close touch with Gabrielle Enthoven's infectious enthusiasm for all matters theatrical. When, therefore, I was present at the foundation meeting of the Society for Theatre Research I was glad to join in the general acclaim of her as its first President. It is highly fitting that the Society's third annual publication, a collection of *Studies in English Theatre History*,* should be dedicated to her memory.

A Memoir by Mr. James Laver, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which houses Mrs. Enthoven's precious Theatre Collection, throws fresh light upon her as an amateur actress and playwright. It tells of the growth of her collection of Playbills, of which the earliest are dated 1737, from small beginnings to 80,000 at the time of its acceptance by the Museum, and now to 100,000; and Mr. Laver traces their development into the programmes of to-day.

As a token of the international importance of Mrs. Enthoven's achievement the *Studies* are headed by Dr. U. van Lennep, Director of the Harvard Theatre Collection, with a note on Henry Harris, the Restoration actor, much of our information about whom comes from Pepys, who knew him well. Harris played a surprising number of roles not only on the stage but in real life, for he was a singer, dancer, painter, yeoman of the revels, engraver of seals, commissioner of stamps, and a captain in the army.

In "The Players in Cambridge, 1662-1800," Miss Sybil Rosenfeld tells of the attitude, chiefly hostile, of the academic authorities towards the professional players. Stourbridge Fair, held

annually in September, was a magnet for strolling companies, but when Martin Powell in 1672 acted comedies there, with a patent from the Master of the Revels, this was denounced as being against the statutes of the University as he had not got a licence from the Vice-Chancellor. Other actors followed who in default of a licence paid a small fine. Between 1701 and 1737 the University took more drastic steps to suppress the players, and in June, 1737, obtained an Act in Parliament which branded as "rogues and vagabonds" any who played for gain within five miles of either University. Nevertheless, performances continued and in 1765 provincial companies appeared in plays, with some musical accompaniment, disguised as "oratorios."

The success of another Martin Powell as the exhibitor of a puppet show is chronicled by Mr. George Speaight. He is first heard of as catering for the fashionable society at Bath in 1709, after which he came to London, and with his show in St. Martin's Lane was soon drawing away most of the female audience from the opera. He moved in 1711 to a place "fitter to receive persons of quality" in the Little Piazza, Covent Garden. By the end of 1713 a reaction had set in and his Piazza theatre was closed, though a year later he was still sufficiently of public interest for a satirical attack on Harley, Earl of Oxford, to be entitled *A Second Tale of a Tub or The History of Robert (sic) Powel the Puppet-Show-Man*.

Miss St. Clare Byrne transports us to Macklin's appearance as Macbeth at Covent Garden in 1773. She denounces the still current legend that he introduced the kilt into Macbeth's costume. In neither of the two contemporary drawings of him in this role, both reproduced in this volume, is he so attired.

Mrs. Norma Hodgson carries us off

* "Studies in English Theatre History." Published by the Society for Theatre Research.

to Sarah Baker, "Governess General of the Kentish Drama." This illiterate woman, apparently without acting experience or financial backing, is one of the most colourful and successful personalities in theatrical history. After earlier struggles she established from the 1780's onwards a complete ascendancy in the chief Kentish towns. In Canterbury Mrs. Baker held sway for 35 years, first in an old theatre in the Buttermarket, afterwards from 1790 in a new one which she built in Prince of Orange Street at a cost of nearly £3,000, still standing though derelict. In Rochester also she migrated in 1791 from more modest premises to the Star Hill Theatre on which she spent £2,000, and which Dickens visited as a child. At Faversham, after productions in a barn and a wooden theatre, she opened a more solid structure in 1790. All her theatres were without ornament inside or out, and she catered mainly not for the "quality" but for the townsfolk and the local garrisons.

The *Studies* shift to the south-west of England with the 1829 Inventory of the Bristol Theatre Royal. This is printed from the transcript made by Miss Kathleen Barker, with notes by Miss St. Clare Byrne and Mr. Richard Southern. The list opens with "6 pair of Wood Wings, 16' by 8' each pair," and Mr. Southern points out that we are lucky to be told that all flats and wings in the Bristol theatre had a standard height of 16 feet. Miss Byrne suggests that "six rolling water waves" were "called upon, presumably, for the sea storms which figure in a number of pieces in the eighteen-twenties."

That the course of theatrical history did not always run smoothly is brought to mind by Sir St. Vincent Troubridge in his lecture-article on "Theatre Riots in London." In the "Bottle-Conjuror Riot" in 1749 at the Little Theatre in Haymarket an Italian conjuror, Calagorri, had announced that he would make a man emerge from a quart beer bottle, and had attracted a fashionable crowd. He then said that if they would

MACKLIN AS MACBETH
The London Magazine, Nov. 1773



pay double the price of their seats he would make the man appear from a pint bottle. But when after two hours' wait the conjuror was found to have vanished a destructive uproar ensued. The Chinese Festival Riots at Drury Lane lasted for six nights in November, 1755. There was popular resentment because French performers had been engaged in the Company for a "Chinese" ballet-spectacle. In the hope of avoiding a disturbance Garrick persuaded King George II to be present on the first and third nights, with partial effect. On the sixth night things came to a head with a free fight between the gentlemen who leapt down from the boxes and the ringleaders in the pit.

All theatrical riots before or since pale beside those at the rebuilt Covent Garden Theatre, beginning on November 18, 1809, known as the O.P. or Old Price Riots. Owing to the increased expense of the new larger house the management raised the prices of

the cheaper seats. They also added to the number of privileged private boxes and they engaged as a special attraction the Italian singer Madam Catalini. These various developments led to an infuriated outbreak which in different forms lasted for sixty-seven nights and was then ended in a compromise.

In "Barnstorming Days" Sir Barry Jackson gives some of his own and his correspondents' recollections of the Portable Theatre. The first of these from personal memories is of a company in the 1900's playing in a tent at

Bidford-on-Avon whose repertory included *Sweeney Todd* and *The Campden Wonder*. Sir Barry also examined a diary recording that for three years in the 1890's the Jennings Portable Theatre Company presented between 200 and 300 different plays. In one week *Hamlet* is found together with *Jack Sheppard* and *Buffalo Bill*. The actors only "got the gist of the play; improvisation did the rest."

It is fitting that he, so close a friend of Mrs. Enthoven, should bring this memorial volume to an end.

TELEVISION AND THE STAGE

*A speech at the B.D.L. Harrogate Conference proposing the Resolution:
"That this Conference believes that the influence of Television on the living theatre
will ultimately be a good one."*

by Ken Tynan

I HAVE come to this Conference first to reassure you and afterwards to dismay you; to prove the immediate innocence of this octopus TV, and perhaps suggest afterwards its underlying guilt. What are the distinguishing qualities of TV? First, it is not past history. All films, all plays are showing something which has been rehearsed, something which has happened in the past. What we see on TV is happening now, and it can persuade us that we are eavesdropping on actual events. The living stage must admit that its claims to realism, which have been challenged by the film industry for a long time, are now absolutely annihilated by TV. B.B.C. Listener Research has triumphantly proved that TV does not keep people indoors except on Saturday afternoon when sporting events are televised. The immediate ability to see what is happening is TV's big draw.

TV is the most far-reaching kind of entertainment. A thousand people at one time see a play; five million see a TV show—enough people to keep that play running happily for fourteen years. But there will always be people who would far rather be one person out of a thousand than one person out of five million. This kind of person I will call

a good snob—the person who would rather be one in a small party than one in a crowd, who feels "This was rehearsed for me personally; the actors have come here for me." To that kind of "snob" TV will lose all its appeal.

In the early days it was the toy of the snob. It is now the opposite. Eighty per cent. of TV owners did not stay at school after the age of fourteen; 80 per cent. of them earn under £13 a week, and it has been succinctly and rather cruelly stated that people who drop their aitches in conversation compensate for it by raising them up over their roof-tops. Obviously, this extremely broad audience is never going to have any allure for your good snob. He has always been the backbone of the theatre, even in the days of Shakespeare's Globe, and to infer that he will be drawn away from the stage by TV is about as absurd as the suggestion that the value of a Constable painting has been depreciated by post-card reproduction.

It is rather the film audience and the TV audience which are overlapping dangerously. The two robot media, films and TV, are going to be more and more at each other's throats. As more and more TV programmes are

put on films (and indeed in about five years nearly all of them will be) the TV auditor is going to realise that his pocket-handkerchief at home is showing him exactly the same things as the tablecloth at the Odeon. So when he goes out he will want a change, and I suggest he will go to the theatre.

When you watch TV you become mobile instead of static spectators. The camera is taking you on a conducted tour of experiences. It is saying "I want to pick out this face for you now, and that foot now"; you are being told what to look at. But in the theatre you are far more free; your eye can do its own close-ups and pick out what it wishes, and choose what it wants to emphasise, and this suits our play-going snob, who does not like Cook's tours.

A further point about TV is that it happens at home. Strangers are coming amongst you. Your guests are starting to sing, recite, and dance. They may also lecture you, but mainly it is as if there were a party every night in your home at which you need make no effort to be entertaining. Your guests, the people in the little box, seem perfectly happy, and you can interrupt them without any risk of offending them. If you hate them you can make them into gibbering idiots by turning off the sound. This is one of TV's most powerful attractions, and indeed there are some actors and some plays that should never appear except on TV. TV's influence in keeping people at home is enormous. One's own chair, pipe and beer, and one's own freedom of initiative intact! What does it lack? First, applause; the immediate giving of thanks, which is one of the pleasures of the theatre. The Odeon has not got this either, but TV also lacks the proximity of those who are applauding, one's fellow-thanksgivers. From TV you can never get that wave of laughter or of sighs which at a theatre can overcome you and cause you to forget yourself entirely. You can never forget yourself at home. Nor can you enjoy the theatre's sense of ritual, of taking

part at the occurrence of some great prepared event. In the theatre people get up on a raised platform to speak, sure in the knowledge that we shall not want to interrupt them. There is no dignity in an art-form which can be turned off. I am convinced, therefore, that TV is not going to keep the playgoer away from the living theatre. Its distinguishing qualities, though they overlap the qualities of the film, do not and will not overlap those of the stage.

There are two smaller points to consider. I have been talking only of the playgoer in London and the bigger cities. On the playgoer in the country town and the smaller provincial town the influence will be more serious. A really big TV production of a West End play will cause no drop in the box office of that play, but it will immediately affect the box office of the local provincial theatre. The day after the TV production of *Reluctant Heroes* from the Whitehall Theatre the box office went up 2,000 per cent. On the night of that TV show there was a drop in the attendance at theatres in the North of England.

A bad production on TV can do a lot of harm because when a stage production of that play comes to the provincial theatre your TV owner having been once bitten is twice shy, even if the play is *Hamlet* and the star is Gielgud. Any repertory company or amateur society which performs the play will suffer. Even when a play has been done well on TV you would be wise to wait a year before doing it.

All in all, TV is essentially our ally. It is a medium for actors and for writers, that is, for us. We must accept it, assess its strength and its weaknesses as I have tried to do, and then without resentment start to exploit them, realising that although TV may wither a great many of the outposts of the theatre, it cannot touch its heart, and realising too that it is going to modify in some way everyone's approach to play-making and playgoing for the rest of foreseeable history.

STRATFORD IN SUMMER

by E. Martin Browne

RETURNING to Stratford in idyllic summer weather, one is more than ever conscious of what its surroundings contribute to the success of the theatre. Thumbing over volumes of old photographs and press-cuttings, one recalls how long has been the struggle which has made this little town one of the world's Meccas. Now the patient work of the pioneers has filled it with visitors, who throng the lazy-pacing Avon and gaze with curious awe at the timber-frame buildings that were so ordinary to its Bard. This is the essence of England, they feel: and indeed Stratford, with its untidy mixture of the picturesque and the commercial, and its double life lived with farmer and tourist, might stand as the prototype of English townships.

So the crowd that flocks into the

theatre goes, not in a metropolitan mood, but in country-holiday spirit. There are of course many students of many colours—one saw Indians, Africans, and Japanese in a single row. But they find themselves part of an audience mainly composed of the English on holiday. Why then does not that audience respond more actively to the fare it gets this summer? It is not over-critical, yet it is also not quickly responsive. Why not?

Each of the three productions made since Easter illustrates in its own way the problems of this theatre—a place for spectacle, where words must be belaboured to be heard. In *Macbeth* the setting is a black background for costume; the play is thus left to the actors, and few of them can project its colossal rhetoric without losing



MACBETH: THE FINAL COMBAT

Ralph Richardson as Macbeth and Jack Gwillim as Macduff in the 1952 Stratford production.

character through the strain. Ralph Richardson, dressed as a barbaric soldier, plays as a bewildered poet, so that the performance loses reality as Macbeth's character hardens. The witches, crouched over smoke without fire, speak lines without magic. Lady Macbeth, whose steely will should be the mainspring of the human plot, proves to be outside Margaret Leighton's range, and only her beauty registers. So *Macbeth* is a darkness relieved only by such tiny rays as Leo Ciceri's messenger of Birnam Wood.

As *You Like It* happens mostly in a forest wherein the Primavera displaces winter. The stage pictures, often beautiful, seem to incite the actors to match their elaboration. The play does best in the court scenes, mostly well forward on the stage, where Powys Thomas puts enough passion into Duke Frederick to make his rage exciting and his conversion believable, and Alan Townsend's wrestling match with Laurence Harvey is truly thrilling. Harvey's manly yet sensitive Orlando is satisfying. Margaret Leighton makes absolutely the right approach to Rosalind, and if she would trust her poet and let the part play itself she would move us continually to delight, as she now does only at moments. The same is true of the banished duke's forest-court, where a forced heartiness denies Shakespeare's delicately satirical idea, and Michael Hordern as Jaques seems to be searching for new ways to say the famous speeches. This play can still be trusted to look after itself: Shakespeare's lyric genius is at its height and only needs to be allowed to sing through the lines. The rustic comedy is keyed to match the satire. Corin is a countryman to whom the invading courtiers are slightly absurd, and William is a "clown" from a village, not a circus, while Audrey should be buxom, not blowsy. This side of the play suffered from what hitherto has never appeared in Glen Byam Shaw's work—over-production.

Volpone was also produced by George

Devine to the zenith, but Johnson is a hard-hitting writer and needs boisterous treatment. Malcolm Pride, a young newcomer, gave it a brilliant colour-scheme that continually ravished the eye, though his sets were oddly mixed in convention. Ralph Richardson's *Volpone* was accomplished, but lacked the zest for life which the play demands, and which was supplied in full measure by Anthony Quayle. Surprisingly cast as Mosca, he revealed the gadfly's busy brain so clearly, and gave us such a large share in the enjoyment of his clever schemes, that we became enchanted by the wicked creature. The moral basis of the play suffered indeed some disturbance, not only as a result of this fine performance, but also from a lack of depth in the final scene. One was brought back again to the feeling that the qualities that move an audience most—sincerity and poetry—need to be cultivated at Stratford if the theatre's success is to be as enduring as we all wish it to be.

COMPETITION

The filming of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a significant event to film and theatre audiences. We are therefore glad to announce a competition for THE BEST CRITICAL APPRECIATION of not more than 300 words. Prizes of Book Tokens value £3 3s., £2 2s., and £1 1s. will be awarded by General Film Distributors Ltd. Entries, addressed to DRAMA, should arrive by January 10; the result of the competition will be published in our Spring number.

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Hon. Secretary:

GUILD OF DRAMA ADJUDICATORS
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WILLIAM POEL

by C. B. Purdom

AMONG those who laboured in the London Theatre in the last century none is more certain to have a continuing influence than William Poel, who in his day was looked upon as a crank and died poor and neglected. Born on July 22, 1852, his real name being Pole, changed because his father objected to his enthusiasm for the stage, Poel was twenty-three when he formed the Shakespeare Reading Society, with Henry Irving as its president, to enable him to rehearse its members in his own method of speaking dramatic verse. He had to rely upon amateurs, for professionals would not listen to him.

In 1881 Poel shocked the town by a performance of the First Quarto *Hamlet* in Elizabethan costume and without scenery. He followed this by getting the support of an influential committee and converting the stage of the Royalty Theatre into a resemblance of Alleyn's Fortune Theatre stage on which he gave a performance of *Measure for Measure*. Then he established the Elizabethan Stage Society, which had a long record of production of plays by Marlowe, Ben Johnson, Ford, Beaumont and Fletcher, and, of course, Shakespeare. His most successful production was *Everyman*. Poel's aim was to get the plays produced with simplicity and rapidity, and for this purpose he regarded the platform stage as essential.

Poel was not an antiquarian, though he insisted on going back to the original conditions, but his object was to get the plays appreciated as living poetical works. He was highly praised by a few, including Bernard Shaw, but he encountered much bitter opposition, for what he wanted was directly counter to the spectacular staging of Shakespeare, which, originated by Charles Kean in the very year of Poel's birth, was regarded as the only possible way

of presenting the plays. Though Nugent Monck and Granville-Barker, both of whom worked with him, carried on his ideas, they are still not accepted, for current Shakespeare production continues in its attachment to spectacle to which the plays are sacrificed.

All the same, the theatre being generous, a tribute to Poel's memory was offered at the Old Vic on July 11, eleven days before the anniversary of his hundredth birthday, under the auspices of the Society for Theatre



WILLIAM POEL

as Fr. Keegan in "*John Bull's Other Island*,"
from a painting by Henry Tonks in the National
Portrait Gallery.

Research. On that occasion Dame Edith Evans, Sir Lewis Casson, and Mr. Robert Atkins related some of their experiences of him and acknowledged Poel's greatness. There followed a number of excerpts from plays produced by Poel, though why they were performed on this occasion was not explained. An exception must be made of a reading of the opening of *Everyman* in Poel's manner, which was admirable, but the other three pieces, scenes from *Edward III*, *Fratricide Punished* and *Troilus and Cressida* had no obvious connection with Poel, except that some of those who worked with Poel played in or produced them. Neither the speaking of these plays, the acting, nor the stage pictures had anything to do with Poel; and what Poel stood for in his long life was flatly contradicted. Two of the excerpts were played on the Old Vic apron stage, but showed no consciousness of the fact that playing on the platform stage is an entirely different thing from playing on the proscenium framed stage, while the third piece was frankly played within the proscenium frame as though Poel had never existed. Poel considered these plays unsuitable for the modern stage and for modern acting, and had he been present he would probably have protested with violence.

This performance suggested that a more serious view must be taken of the requirements of the platform or open stage, and it must be understood that the mere transference of a production outside the proscenium frame does nothing to meet those requirements. Although Poel was against the elaborate spectacle of the contemporary stage, he was not against the beauty appropriate to the plays—beauty of speech, gesture, movement, grouping, and costume. This beauty is hard to attain, and I suggest that it raises the questions, Does it not call for much more than actors protected by the proscenium frame have been accustomed to give, and than producers working within the same conventions have mastered?

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(Published in conjunction with
the Religious Drama Society)

S • P • C • K

NEWS AND VIEWS

THE TWO FOREMOST LITTLE THEATRES OF LONDON have solved their housing problems.

The QUESTORS of Ealing appealed in our Spring issue for funds with which to purchase their present site, on which they plan to replace the well-known temporary theatre by a permanent one. A big industrial firm has made up the balance not raised by the Appeal and the Questors are now secure in their freehold.

The TAVISTOCK, after two years cramped into a small studio, have taken a long lease of an historic building in a part of London which is attracting many artists. Canonbury is in Islington, easily accessible yet quiet, an estate with many beautiful old houses of which Canonbury Tower is the most famous. Sir Francis Bacon lived in it, and some of the rooms have fine Jacobean panelling. A hall was built in the garden fifty years ago, and this is being converted by Guy Sheppard, who designed the Riverside Theatre (DRAMA, Winter, 1951) into a 200-seat theatre. The Tavistock Company hopes to open "the Tower" as a Dramatic Centre by Christmas.

"THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE" will be in existence as an Incorporated Company by the time this issue reaches its members. It will be remembered that the decision to incorporate was taken at the last Annual General Meeting.

Each member, on renewing the subscription when it falls due, will be asked to sign the statutory undertaking to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association. These follow the Rules of the unincorporated body, the only additional legal obligation being to contribute an amount not exceeding one pound to any deficit in the event of the League's being wound up at any future date. *This form must be filled in and signed before the membership*

can be registered. Members should therefore take special care to use it when making their next renewal, for by the Articles, they will not be entitled to services after their present subscription expires until the form has been received.

THE NATIONAL FINAL of the Community Drama Festival showed the highest standard since the war, and it reached a vast new public through the Television of the second and third plays on July 30th. These are good auguries.

The winners, Sutton Amateur Dramatic Club, celebrate their jubilee with this victory. Their scenes from *The Heiress* were not available for television, so the programme given consisted of *The Deluge* (Chester Miracle Play) by the Southampton W.E.A. Players and a new Welsh play *The Sound of Stillness* by T. C. Thomas from the little Brecon village of Llangorst. Scotland was represented in the Finals by a richly colourful production of *Lucrezia Borgia's Little Party*, and the Durham Dramatic Society gallantly staged Act I of *The Witch* despite the illness of Margaret Marshall, their producer (now happily recovered).

The Geoffrey Whitworth Cup was won by The Upstarts of Erith for their production of John Langley's *Eight Times Christopher*. The League's Chairman, Mr. John Maude, Q.C., in presenting it, spoke of his predecessor, the League's Founder, and the encouragement he gave to original playwriting, of which the Cup was the enduring testimony.

FEES FOR ADJUDICATION:

The British Drama League has agreed with the Guild of Drama Adjudicators new scales of remuneration at the various stages of the National Festival. It should be pointed out that these scales are specially arranged for that Festival in view of its nation-wide character, and are not to be taken as standard charges for adjudication. The League does not arrange terms for any other Festivals than its own.

THE TOWN HALL AT CRAYFORD
*where he conceived the idea of the League,
will house the first memorial to its Founder.*

On Thursday, October 2nd, local players will perform the two one-act plays which Mr. Whitworth saw on that historic evening in 1918, and a Plaque commemorating the occasion will be unveiled by Miss Lena Ashwell, O.B.E.

A portrait bust of Miss ASHWELL by Peter Lambda will be handed over to the League by Miss Athene Seyler on behalf of the subscribers at 12 noon on Saturday, September 20. Subscribers who wish to join in this presentation will be welcome at 9 Fitzroy Square.

JOHN HIRST did more than any man to build up the League's work in the North. The presentation of a watch to him at a luncheon in his honour at Harrogate was a very small token of the affection that hundreds feel for him. He never appeared on a stage himself, but made that delight possible for others. He fought hard and unceasingly for all that was best in the amateur theatre.

DR. BOAS was ninety on July 24. All those who have worked with him at the League signed a message of congratulation specially bound as a small volume. He asks us to convey to them his thanks for this unique gift, "a highlight in a memorable day."

THEATRE WEEK-ENDS are the newest enterprise of the League. They are to be planned like the *Theatre Week* on a smaller scale, with two shows, discussions, and an open forum. The first two will be at COLWYN BAY, North Wales, October 17-19, and MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY, October 31-November 2.

Individual members and members of affiliated groups can get details from the Director of the League, who hopes in course of time to meet many hundreds of them at such gatherings.

THEATRE WEEK next year is to be in LONDON immediately before the Coronation, May 22-30. This year's Week was visited by Harold Hobson, who wrote of it in *The Sunday Times*: "The degree of its success may be judged from the fact that many private members, and the representatives of about 180 affiliated societies, some of them from as far south as Bournemouth, made the journey to Harrogate. They were provided with an entertainment various in unity. In the mornings there were discussions and coffee; in the afternoons expeditions to such places as York, Haworth, and Richmond (followed by tea), and in the evenings performances by societies from

Nottingham, Halifax, Liverpool, Durham, and Harrogate itself, these being completed in the local hotels afterwards, by way of a change, with coffee. There were also (but, so far as I could see, without either tea or coffee) a lecture-recital on style in acting by André van Gysegem, and a talk by Richard Southern on Georgian theatres, as well as other sideshows in the way of speeches, arguments, fraternal disputations, heavy meals, and excursions into the unrivalled Yorkshire countryside, the whole providing, as well as a valuable and stimulating experience, an aesthetic and intellectual holiday of considerable delight."

THIS IS ELECTION YEAR. The League's Council, now the Governing Body of the Incorporated Company, is to be re-elected this Autumn and will hold office for the two years 1953 and 1954. Nominations for National Members are due by September 30. Ballot papers will be circulated to the entire membership during October and the result will be announced at the Annual General Meeting to be held in December.

COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES are also due to be elected this Autumn either at local meetings or by postal ballot.

The functions of a County representative are as follows:—

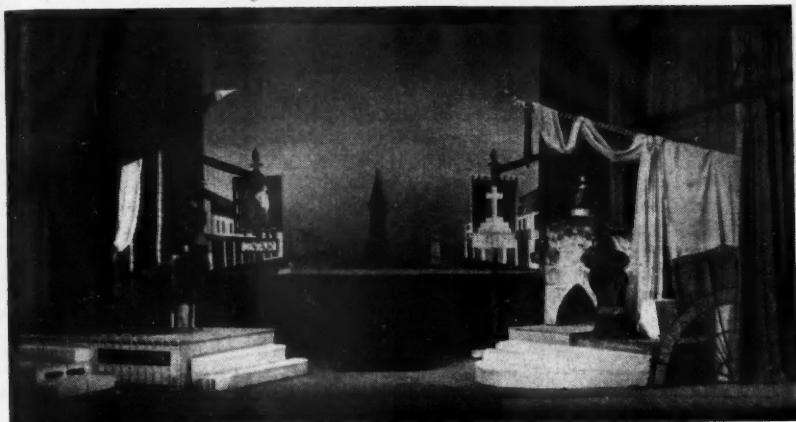
1. To act as a link between members and affiliated Societies in the County and Headquarters in London.
2. To serve on the League's Area Committee and other Committees dealing with dramatic work in the County.
3. To be a link between the Professional and Amateur theatre in the County and to encourage support for the Professional theatre.
4. To keep Headquarters in touch with the dramatic activities in the County especially in regard to Festivals.
5. To serve so far as is possible as a guide, philosopher and friend to members.

Affiliated groups should keep their County Representative informed of their activities and if possible offer complimentary seats for their shows. It is desirable that the County Representatives should be in close touch with the County Drama Adviser who is generally too busy to see every production and would appreciate help in this and other directions. The Council of the League owes an immense debt of gratitude to its County Representatives who have worked for so many years on its behalf and done so much to help the League's members who sometimes feel out of touch with Fitzroy Square. The League realises that this help must necessarily be limited if no financial assistance is given and it hopes to do something at least to help meet their expenses in the future.

The names and addresses of the newly-elected Council and County Representatives will be published in **DRAMA**.

"THE COMEDY OF ERRORS"

Setting by Donald Campbell for the Nottingham Theatre Club's production as presented at the League's Fourth Theatre Week, Harrogate, June 1952.



CHARLES THOMAS, Staff Tutor of the League's Training Department, went to Barbados two years ago for the British Council, and while there designed a "Pocket Theatre" on the Council premises in Bridgetown.

When *Twelfth Night* was given in the Pocket Theatre recently the house was packed for all seven performances. The amateur cast included white and coloured Barbadians and people from Britain.

A leading article in the *Barbados Advocate* stated: The Pocket Theatre is a handmaid of the arts, and if the British Council only had this achievement to its credit it would have justified those who first established a headquarters here. But they have gone even further: they have taken the theatre to the people. By going on tour in St. Peter, St. John, and St. Philip they have taken the little theatre movement to the country.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA has bold plans for its drama this summer. Michael Langham, who came from his success with the Midland Theatre Company to do two *Old Vic* productions last season, is to spend four months there:

In September he adjudicates the State Drama Festival. A course for producers is interwoven with a production at Her Majesty's Theatre in November, and a summer school with a production in the beautiful grounds of the University in January. For these shows the best talent of Perth itself and of the State as a whole will be drawn upon. The whole project was conceived and is being organised by Professor Fred Alexander, head of the Department of Adult Education, with the assistance of the British Council.

DISABLED ACTORS are a special care of the League Library, and one writes from Plymouth:

I am only an ordinary member of the Disabled Fellowship. We number 100 with a like number of healthy associate members.

Last Tuesday I took part in our first attempt at play reading. The only other character was a disabled man who walks with two sticks. (I use a collapsible wheeled chair.) We had only one practice—half an hour before we went on the stage. We performed a broadcast sketch, *Seance*, by L. du Garde Peach. I hope you won't think I am boasting when I tell you it was such a tremendous success that we had to make the audience stop clapping.

When I could walk my hobby was entertaining, so you can guess what the evening meant to me. It was such a thrill to find that after so many years I could still hold and move an audience.

PLAYWRIGHTS, meeting as usual during Theatre Week, stressed the importance of the PLAYWRIGHTS' CLUBS:

They recommended that amateur societies who had premises of their own be asked to sponsor a meeting of those interested, and organise a Club if support were forthcoming. The League could supply a draft constitution and put them in touch with existing Clubs. Ultimately, the Clubs might associate themselves to further the circulation of the best new plays.

"A THEATRE GALLERY GUIDE for the Impecunious Aesthete" is excellent value at sixpence.

The cyclostyled booklet contains details of every West End gallery and tips about stools where seats are not bookable. Copies from 36 Randolph Avenue, London, W.9.

COUNTY EXPERIMENT

SOME years ago, two Education Authorities which together supply the educational, social and recreational needs of nearly a million people (the City and County of Nottingham) each appointed to their respective staffs a Drama Adviser. These two enthusiasts began, in a happy liaison, with the existing adult groups. Amongst them were many people associated with schools where drama already formed an integral part of the curriculum. The knowledge of the activities of the adult groups had its effect upon the work the schools themselves were doing. Some of the most successful efforts of these "early days" were seen when enthusiasts from the local amateur dramatic societies and the teachers from the school's met at school festivals and week-end courses.

Then something dramatic happened in Nottingham. A small professional theatre suddenly became vacant. The then Lord Mayor conceived the idea that something in the nature of a Civic Theatre ought to be maintained in a city of the size, importance, and culture of Nottingham. A new University was about to develop out of the former University College. From among business men, professional men, and educationalists interested in good theatre a board of directors was formed for the Nottingham Theatre Trust—a limited liability company for the production of legitimate drama in fortnightly repertory, and the Nottingham Playhouse was launched. Its path has not been an easy one, and it has needed much help at critical times from its principal sponsors, the Arts Council and the Civic Authority. But it has prospered, and some of those who helped to establish it, like its first producer Andre Van Gysegem, actors and actresses like Maxine Audley and George Hagan, and its scenic artist, Anthony Waller, have already made further names for themselves.

Play-acting and the study of drama

began to take on a new sense of reality. With a resident repertory company in the city there was a fair chance that the play you had read in the classroom or produced on the amateur stage would come to life in the Playhouse. If so, you came back inspired and refreshed, understanding more about theatre, yourself, and the world.

Amateur drama, the schools, and the professional stage appeared to be working separately but each in turn was thus co-operating with and inspiring the others. Then came a new fusion. County and City Authorities decided to make use of the resident Playhouse Company in several very special ways.

First, Youth Groups were encouraged to attend selected plays through the purchase of part-subsidised tickets. The scheme developed slowly, but it worked. You could go to the theatre, the real theatre, and see live drama, at a cost which didn't exceed the price of the cheapest seats at the cinema. Then the schools were brought in. The Education Authorities, through their advisers, consulted with the Playhouse Directors and Producer and agreed annually on some six plays which while playing normal evening performances could advantageously be given at special matinees for the schools.

At first the selections were inclined to be haphazard. But gradually the schools were more closely consulted, and a recognisable pattern began to develop in the choice. Thus in three years twenty-one plays have been witnessed by school audiences totalling 30,965. All this, of course, meant extra "business" for the Playhouse. It meant, too, and this was most important to the Playhouse Directors, the gradual building up of an adolescent interest in the theatre, some of which might be expected to continue in later years. One youngster wrote of a Shakespearean production: "It was so good it was almost worth paying to go and see."

These youthful and vigorous audiences were not without influence on the players themselves. A note in the programme, a few words before the curtain went up, helped to focus attention on the things that mattered. After the curtain fell an exchange of questions and answers between audience and cast was found to be stimulating and provocative. Sometimes it was devastating, as when after *Twelfth Night* an apparently slow-witted child asked: "Why did you paint the door of Olivia's house yellow, when she hated the colour?" This feeling of partnership between school audience and players was further extended when members of the cast or the producer himself adjudicated on school productions.

If these things were good enough for the children who lived in or about the city, what was to be done for the rural children or those living in the smaller townships further north where no Playhouse existed? The solution was an itinerant band of players, provided in part by a junior team from the Playhouse itself and in part by visits from the Young Vic Company. Thus have been produced for the children of Mansfield, Worksop, Retford and Newark extracts from *Henry V*, *The Proposal*, *A Night at an Inn*, *The Princess with the Secret Sorrow*, and *Twelfth Night*.

But the further the companies journeyed from Nottingham the less sophisticated the audiences were and the greater became the variation both in age and understanding of the children concerned. In the beginning, at any rate, country children and certainly very young children needed dramatic material of a different character from that already provided in the towns. This need was met by the performances of itinerant companies such as the Mobile Theatre. Their *Dick Whittington*, *When the Countries Meet*, *The End of a Fairy Tale*, *Victoria Regina* (Housman), *The Mad Hatter's Tea Party* began to provide the first steps in dramatic appreciation for many children, who had seen little more

than school plays and village pantomimes. Even dull and backward children in residential special schools were catered for by specially written one-act plays based on fairy tales.

And what has been the cost of all this educationally? To the County Education Authority some £9,200 in 3 years. And the result? About 76,000 children, some living near a struggling Playhouse, some miles away from any legitimate theatre, have been given a first experience of drama. This is no educational frill. It is part of the full social and cultural development of every individual. The pity is that so few in England have the opportunity of this organised and graduated beginning in the art of theatre-going. Throughout the County the results are already felt. There is a continuous trickle of youthful and enthusiastic members to the amateur societies, and to the Playhouse there is already a welcome accession of new strength in the form of critical adolescent audiences.

J. EDWARD MASON

PERIOD PIECES

NO art exists in a void—the art of the theatre least of all. Actors and producers undertaking period plays have a great deal of work to do before they even start rehearsal. They must acquire, if they do not already possess it, an intimate knowledge of the period in which their play is set, its appearance, its customs and its mode of thought. Such knowledge cannot be gained by short cuts; to read one or two books is not enough. They must study the writing, the fashions, the painting, the music, and the architecture of their period. Only thus can they feel at home in the world they wish to portray and acquire that easy familiarity which is the first step towards the most elusive and undefinable of qualities—style in acting.

Of all period comedy that of the Restoration is perhaps the most difficult. Unless it is played with the

utmost pace and brilliance the wit can seem but tired variations on a well-worn theme and such are the complexities of the plots that unless each line is played with great point and crystal clarity it can become "harder to be understood than a piece of Egyptian Antiquity or an Irish Manuscript."

The Brondesbury Players, attempting one of the great Restoration comedies, Congreve's *Love for Love*, at the Fortune Theatre, met with very little success. Far too little trouble seemed to have been taken over this production. The pace was funereally slow, the lighting dismal, most of the performances uncertain, and the wigs and costumes of quite the wrong period. The great comedy limped along and finally expired. Though amateurs should aim high they must aim realistically and in keeping with their talents and resources.

The Chiswick House of Arts Drama Circle had obviously taken great pains with its production of Colley Cibber's *The Careless Husband* at the Chiswick Town Hall. The sets, costumes, and period music were unobtrusively good. The performances, however, lacked the sparkle and attack necessary to bring this piece to life. Only Lord Foppington, not scrupling to o'erstep the modesty of nature, succeeded in giving his lines the necessary lift. Colley Cibber, described as England's worst Poet Laureate, was an indifferent dramatist. His plays now have little more than academic interest. Although by introducing sentiment to the stage he paved the way for the eighteenth century dramatists, in his own *Careless Husband* licence and sentiment make uneasy partners and, ironically, it is the latter quality which rings out of tune and harsh.

Ostrovsky's brilliant satirical comedy, *The Diary of a Scoundrel*, was given an excellent performance by the Croydon Players at the Croydon Town Hall. The production was swift, lively and authoritative, the performances good and the costumes and settings of a very high standard. How well this early

nineteenth century comedy wears with its good-natured satire on bureaucracy and its eternal middle-class types! The Croydon Players are again to be congratulated upon their excellent choice of play and their high standard of achievement and it is to be hoped that before long they will acquire the permanent home which their work undoubtedly merits.

DONALD FITZJOHN

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,

I entirely sympathise with the feelings of your critic when reading my play *The Emperor Constantine*; seeing it only on paper one might well be tempted to suppose that the Nicene Council scene would be deadly on the stage. As a matter of hard fact, however, this was the scene which in practice proved to be the "best theatre" in the whole play. It was particularly liked by that "common man" element in the audience which knew nothing about theology, and I know of people, both in Colchester and in London, who came two or three times to the play, simply to see and hear that scene again. It is also a fact that all the professionals in both casts spotted the scene instantly, at first reading, as good theatre. The only people who, as a body, did not like it were the dramatic critics, who are (if one may say so) a class apart.

I feel that it may be of some interest to you to know this, because it provides one of the most striking examples in my experience of the difference in effect of the scene on paper and the scene in action. The difficulty of judging the "stage-worthiness" of any play from the script lies at the bottom of many strange managerial decisions, and accounts for the hesitation of some West End managements to risk money on any unknown play "off the script" without seeing it tried out by some more adventurous manager in the provinces.

Yours faithfully,

DOROTHY L. SAYERS.

Witham, Essex.

THEATRE BOOKSHELF

NORTH WINDS

"*The Three Ibsens*," by Bergliot Ibsen. Hutchinson 15s.

"*Chekhov the Dramatist*," by David Magarshack. John Lehmann. 21s.

"*The Seagull*" produced by Stanislavsky." Dobson. 25s.

"*Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852: A Centenary Survey)*," by Janko Lavrin. Sylvan Press. 12s. 6d.

"*Three Famous Plays*," by Ivan Turgenev, Duckworth. 10s. 6d.

Popular tradition has established Henrik Ibsen so firmly as a man hewn from the solid rock that it is a pleasure to find a more human portrait of him presented by his daughter-in-law. Bergliot Ibsen is a daughter of that other majestic Scandinavian dramatist, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson; she married Ibsen's son, Sigurd, a wise, tragic figure in the politics of Norway. The three Ibsens of her title are her parents-in-law (Henrik and Suzannah) and her husband (Sigurd), but for most readers the heart of her book—translated well by Grik Schjelderup—will be its picture of Henrik Ibsen at home, both during his self-imposed exile and during his last years at Christiania. We are told that he "used to live for a full year or a year and a half with his characters" until he knew them by heart, and what any one of them would do in a given situation. After that he would write the play in a couple of months.

Ibsen stands in this book without the legends that have begun to creep like lichen over his name. For example, Bergliot Ibsen denies the tales of his vanity. "He took his world-fame very calmly; he was certainly quite unruffled by it." Now and then, an Ibsen more like the figure of tradition shows through. A Norwegian author called Paulsen, who had been received by the family abroad, wrote a spiteful and distorted novel which helped to create the legend of Ibsen's unhappy home

life. When the novelist wrote to him later, Ibsen replied on a signed postcard addressed to the Scandinavian Club in Rome, with the one word "Scoundrel!"

The next book takes us to the great Russian who, in his plays, seems to be Ibsen's antithesis. Mr. Magarshack, in a shrewd and detailed study, does not agree with the usual English view that Chekhov's plays lack a well-defined aim and that the characters are generally ineffectual. Chekhov himself strongly rejected this idea. As for plot, Mr. Magarshack says: "It is not its absence but rather its complexity that distinguishes the plays, and the producer who fails to realise that simply cannot see the wood for the trees." This book separates the lesser-known plays of "direct action" (for example, *Ivanov*) from the plays of "indirect action" (*The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*). Producers will find it both useful and provocative, and so will playgoers who come freshly to Chekhov. We should remember that he is less widely known than the various London revivals might lead us to imagine. (Thus, John Harrison's revival of *The Seagull* at the Nottingham Playhouse last spring was the first Chekhov production Nottingham had known.)

With *Chekhov the Dramatist* one should read Stanislavsky's full "production score" of *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898. It is a quite remarkable book, especially the main section in which we have David Magarshack's translation on the left-hand page and Stanislavsky's notes, sketches, and ground plans on the right-hand page. Anyone with a grain of theatrical imagination can now produce *The Seagull* in the theatre of the mind, with Stanislavsky standing by: it is an uncommon experience. For a taste: when, at the beginning of Act Two the stage direction for Arkádina is "Struts about the lawn, with arms akimbo," Stanislavsky has the note:—

"She crosses over to the table with her empty cup, walking very gracefully, then takes a few waltz steps, whirls round and round, blowing her skirt up like a bell, and bursts out laughing. Dorn applauds, saying 'Bravo!' Miss Arkádina picks up an apple from the table and goes back to her old place."

Two other Russian dramatists appear in this list. Professor Lavrin has a quick, lucid study of Gogol, who wrote the best satirical comedy in the Russian repertory (*The Government Inspector*), and who, according to Lavrin, "was in his element only when ridiculing the world he knew; when indulging in moral pessimism and in disgust with life." And there is need only to welcome a reprint—now as a "Famous Plays" volume—of the Constance Garnett version of three works by Turgenev: *A Month in the Country* is the best-known to British audiences.

J. C. TREWIN

DANCERS AND PUPPETS

"*Indian Dancing*," by Ram Gopal and Serozh Dadachanji. Phoenix. 16s.

"*The Puppet Theatre*," by Jan Bussell. Faber. 12s. 6d.

"*Your Puppetry*," by John Wright. Sylvan Press. 9s. 6d.

"*A Seat at the Ballet*," by Caryl Brahms. Evans Bros. 12s. 6d.

"*In Praise of Ballet*," compiled by Grace Clarke. Muller. 3s.

The well known Hindu dancer, Ram Gopal, has collaborated with the critic, Serozh Dadachanji, to provide a useful introduction to Indian Dancing. A brief survey of its origin and history is followed by an explanation of the basic principles of gesture language, the division of the *mudras*, and the part played by the different parts of the body. There are also notes on lighting, make-up, and music. The succeeding chapters are devoted respectively to the four main styles of Dance: *Bharati Nityam*, or temple dance; *Kathakali*, literally "musical dance-drama," originating from Malabar; *Kathak*, the dance of Northern India; and *Manipuri*, the dances of a state in Assam. The book concludes with a comparison of

Eastern and Western Dance Forms. Here the authors are on less familiar ground. In Western ballet, they comment, "the dancer appeals primarily to the senses, while the spirit remains untouched." I submit that Markova's *Giselle* in Act II and Fonteyn's *Odette* in *Lac* are entirely of the spirit. The authors assert that Diaghilev "allowed Stravinsky's score to subjugate Fokine's choreography, notably in *Le Sacre du Printemps* and *Noce*." But the former was arranged by Nijinsky and the latter by Nijinska. Discussing music for ballet, the authors urge that it be composed to suit the choreography; such music is apt to lack design. The book has ninety-four illustrations, including several of Ram Gopal and a useful series of double-hand gestures.

In *The Puppet Theatre*, Jan Bussell first establishes the relation between puppet, puppeteer, and audience, and defines the five main types of puppet, then gives practical instructions for the making of marionettes, their manipulation and the construction of marionette stages; after which he discusses shadow puppets and glove puppets. The book concludes with notes on production and the use of puppets in cabaret, music hall, cinema, television, and so on. There are many text illustrations, some charming drawings by Francis Gower, and photographs of various puppet types.

Your Puppetry is an excellent practical handbook on marionettes, from designing and carving the head, torso, and limbs to colouring, clothing, and manipulating the puppet, followed by detailed instructions for building a stage and making scenery, followed by hints on lighting and production. The book includes 135 diagrams, all admirably clear.

A Seat at the Ballet is intended to initiate the newcomer to Ballet regarding the function and importance of artistic director, *prima ballerina*, soloist, *premier danseur*, and *corps de ballet*. It also discusses different types of ballets and the dance characteristics of their

choreographers, both English and foreign, and the contribution made by settings, costumes, and music. Miss Brahms's book is informative and helpful, although a tendency to indulge in *badinage* is sometimes irritating. The spelling of French terms and ballet titles leaves something to be desired.

In Praise of Ballet is a new title in a series of popular short anthologies on various subjects. Strictly speaking, few of the quotations are in praise of ballet; they are rather a medley of extracts in praise of, or defining, the dance, statements by or about dancers, and a few pen portraits of dancers. The principle governing the choice of quotations is sometimes obscure.

CYRIL BEAUMONT

ADVENTURE STORIES

"*Lovely Peggy*," by Janet Camden Lucy. Hurst and Blackett. 18s.

"*Ireland's Abbey Theatre, A History, 1899-1951*," by Lennox Robinson. Sidgwick and Jackson. 30s.

"*Showboats*," by Philip Graham. Univ. of Texas. 25s.

These are adventure stories; of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries respectively. They tell of the launching (literal and figurative) of bold enterprises, of challenge, conflict, and conquest, sometimes of catastrophe; and they all deal with the irresistible power of personality. Peg Woffington, Callie French, Willie Yeats and their circles of friends and enemies colour these books with the brightness of courage, vision, enthusiasm, and sheer zest for life; they are in every sense moving spirits, and when they die we feel a personal sense of loss. But also sometimes a tantalising sense of intangibility, for personality, charm, and above all the art of the actor are indefinable things, only to be fully grasped by actual contact.

One might introduce Miss Camden Lucy's *Lovely Peggy* by re-quoting, from Mr. Lennox Robinson, Colley Cibber's remark that "the animated graces of the player can live no longer than the

instant breath and motion that presents them; or at best can but faintly glimmer through the memory of imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators." Peg Woffington the woman stands out in vivid relief, but Mrs. Woffington the actress somehow refuses to present herself; the spell which she cast over her audiences refuses to work and we are left with the impression of tremendous receptions rather than of brilliant performances; it is rather as though we heard only the applause and didn't see the show. The discordant voice, the excellence in comedy, the competence in tragedy, the ease and naturalness—all these we grasp—but not the real quality of Peg's acting. Miss Camden Lucy's main intention, however, is achieved—that of presenting a balanced portrait, reviewed in the light of modern standards, of an essentially "modern" woman, whose career has hitherto been exaggerated in smutty memoirs or falsified in romantic novels. The book, well documented, has an authentic, lifelike ring throughout, from the everyday tussles with the unspeakable blue-eyed Bellamy to such great occasions as the night of November 6, 1760, when Garrick first saw Peg, at the Royal Command Performance of the *Recruiting Officer*. But "Peg Woffington was never invited to Strawberry Hill, she was not commended by Johnson, nor buried in Westminster Abbey" and though maybe her reputation forbade these honours, there is probably something besides. She had lived for the stage, but perhaps the secret was that she never lost herself in it. Perhaps Peg had always been a remarkable woman rather than a great actress.

Mr. Lennox Robinson's book is the official history commissioned by the Abbey Theatre authorities. He emphasises that it is neither an appreciation nor a criticism and that he has "tried to bury his likes and dislikes"; and he has indeed been wholly successful in "making the book a History which future students may feel con-

fident to quote." It will be a standard reference book for many years to come and one not only to be dipped into but to be lingered over; one could spend hours looking over the casts of first productions alone. With a detachment that is especially admirable in one who has been for so long closely involved in the Theatre he outlines with full substantiating detail its birth, development, decline, revival, destruction by fire and latter-day resurrection. It is a story that one never tires of hearing; the minutest minute of an Abbey Theatre committee seems to be charged with excitement. Valuable additions to the known story are the reminiscences Mr. Robinson has gathered from faithful back-stage members, and his vivid portrait of the beautiful, quixotic, generous, difficult Miss Horniman. He is modest to a fault, the only section of the history which is perhaps inadequately treated being that for which he himself was responsible. He is unswervingly loyal to his duty as historian, but, one feels, slightly restricted by the enforced use of narrative—as though it were merely a sort of utilitarian, stage-direction kind of medium—and the playwright in him turns with relief to the delightful Appendix I in which he carries on an imaginary conversation with a visitor to the theatre, giving his personal memories of the great people who gaze down from the portraits on its walls.

Philip Graham's is another sober account of exciting people and projects. How surprised those old showboat-owners would have been to find themselves the subject of scholarly research! And yet they are really the American equivalent of the Abbey Theatre. They brought a native, indigenous form of entertainment to the "folk"; these floating theatres which drifted down the great southern rivers to remote places which had never known anything in the form of professional entertainment bear some faint resemblance, too, to England's medieval pageant-drama. Professor Graham

gives a fascinating description of the hazards and achievements of both watermanship and showmanship which the profession involved. From Chapman's Floating Theatre of the 1850's to the Majestic, still afloat, the names of the showboats—French's New Sensation, Cotton Blossom, Goldenrod, Sunny South—reflect the glamour of their cargo. But the author dispels the false glamour and distortion from the popular novels and plays which deal with showboats and very clearly reveals the true showboat tradition of harmless boisterous variety or full-blooded melodrama which only later degenerated into burlesque, and which always maintained the highest standards of decency and respectability. For it was essentially a family tradition. The most delightful parts of the book are those which describe the gay, versatile, eccentric, resourceful members of these families—particularly the indomitable Mrs. Callie French, who not only taught herself to walk the tightrope but also was the first woman to gain a captain's licence. With the same versatility the calliope which blared out jolly melodies within a radius of anything up to eight miles, in its off time distilled river water for drinking. Both are symbolical of the spirit of showboat enterprise.

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James Bridie

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you awake. The actors' personalities shine through their theories. Can any conclusion be drawn from these? None, except that acting is even more difficult to define than the other arts. All the famous controversies end in obscurity or confusion. Yet the actor's effort to put his knowledge into words does have a meaning for those who see his performances: and it is possible to gain understanding of the old actors' writings by collating them with those of contemporary critics, and to evaluate those of living actors by comparing their well-selected contributions to this book with our own experience of their work on the stage. *Actors on Acting* will certainly illuminate theatregoing, and is well worth possessing.

E. MARTIN BROWNE

"Changeable Scenery. Its Origin and Development in the British Theatre," by Richard Southern. Faber. 63s. net.

If the grammar of a subject is fundamental, and if the proper place for plays is the theatre—as I fervently believe—then Richard Southern's authoritative study of the technical aspects of stage scenery and scene changing must be regarded as essential reading for all drama and theatre specialists. It is an important book—the fruit of some twenty years of enthusiastic research, checked by acquaintance with modern theatre practice and backed by the unpublished notes of that pioneer of all such research, W. J. Lawrence. It traces the history of the use and development of changeable scenery from the Tudor and Stuart masques to modern times, and by careful investigation of all kinds of evidence seeks to answer those perennially fascinating questions, "What did it look like?" "How did it work?" "How were shows staged?"

Besides giving us an enormous amount of practical information Mr. Southern has much sound and illuminating comment to offer by the way to help us to a better under-

standing of the intentions of scenery and scene changing in other centuries. We must realise that the changing of scenes was part of the attraction of the visual theatre show and "came into existence purely to be watched"; and that the scenery itself, until the nineteenth century, was not intended to be "illustrative surroundings to passages of drama" but was a contribution to theatre, "stylised decorations," "backings for a stage, apt for almost any occasion." Scenic "reform," or, rather, a radical change in scenic intention which began to manifest itself in the realistic built-up sets of the last hundred years, has now brought us to the point where "changeable scenery" for drama is virtually non-existent.

The book, throughout, is as copiously and excitingly illustrated by contemporary reference as by pictorial evidence; and it is impossible, in a brief notice, to do justice either to its scholarship, its clearly-developed argument, its abundance of fresh material, or its vivid picture of stage conditions. It is the comprehensive study of technical detail for which English theatre research in general has long been waiting, and it should do much to advance and simplify the work of other specialists.

M. ST. CLARE BYRNE

"English Costume. From the Second Century B.C. to 1950," by Doreen Yarwood. Batsford. 35s.

"17th Century Costume," by Lillian Rojinskii. Pitman. 10s. 6d.

"Drama, its Costume and Decor," by James Laver. Studio. 30s.

The title of Miss Yarwood's book conceals the fact that not only does it contain a history of English costume; but also, as might at first glance seem strange, a rapid survey of the clothes of the Ancient Civilisations up to the Byzantine Empire. Its contents place the book immediately. It is directed not at the serious student of costume, for whom the treatment would be too

cursory, but at the stage, and the amateur stage at that.

From the point of view of the amateur stage, therefore, the book should be judged. A comprehensive but not too specialised survey of the clothes of the various periods likely to appeal to playwrights is undoubtedly needed, but Miss Yarwood's book, unfortunately, does not quite satisfy the need. It is extremely painstaking, but in the very generous supply of illustrations, drawn by herself, the author often fails to grasp the essential shape of a costume—its construction—and the underlying spirit of a fashion. The actress who attempted to wear a copy of the "tunica interior" of either of the Roman ladies portrayed would find that it would immediately fall off—the evidence to be collected from Roman sculpture has been misunderstood. The dandy of 1950 is shown wearing trousers of the wrong length, and the design behind his costume is therefore lost. The silhouette in many of the drawings is modern, so that the book will soon date. Men's shoulders in the eighteenth-century were not square, for instance, nor was medieval dress worn with a modern brassiere.

17th Century Costume, again written and drawn not for the student but for the stage, is more dashingly conceived, but even more 1950 in flavour. The trimmings and patternings of the clothes especially show little trace of the spirit of their period. Miss Rojinskii includes a set of graphs for pattern-cutting, which do not pretend to be accurate reconstructions, but which would be reasonably useful to the dressmaker.

James Laver's book on the Drama speaks to no such limited audience. With his usual broad grasp of his subject, Mr. Laver has produced not only a well-balanced outline of the development of the Drama, its costume and decor, emphasising very rightly the fact that the three are inextricably mingled, but also a commentary on the works and views of other writers



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Production treats its subject exhaustively. The concluding tips under such headings as "double-take," "laying a plant," "leads to audience," "overlapping," and "red herring" constitute a thesaurus of succinct technical ingenuity.

JOHN ALLEN

LONG PLAYS

"*The Fearless Heart*," by George Bernanos. Bodley Head. 10s. 6d.

Samuel French

"*Who Goes There?*" by John Dighton. 5s.

"*Count Your Blessings*," by Ronald Jeans. 5s.

"*Lace on Her Petticoat*," by Aimee Stuart. 5s.

"*Travellers' Joy*," by Arthur Macrae. 5s.

"*Worm's Eye View*," by R. F. Delderfield. 5s.

"*His Excellency*," by Dorothy and Campbell Christie. 5s.

"*The Commissioner's Bungalow*," by Ians Hay and John Smyth. 5s.

"*Black Coffee*," by Agatha Christie. 5s.

"*Sinbad the Sailor*," by Pauline Stuart. 3s.

During the last months of his life, early in 1948, the great French writer Georges Bernanos was working on a film scenario to which he gave the name *Dialogue des Carmélites*. It has now been published in England as *The Fearless Heart*, well translated by Michael Legat. This is the story of sixteen Carmelite nuns martyred during the French Revolution, too spectacular perhaps to be played in the theatre and probably too intricate theologically ever really to make a film; but it inspires these final reflections of a powerful thinker on the theme of Fear, and they form a deeply compelling, notice-worthy work whether they win agreement or not.

John Dighton's *Who Goes There?* is an engaging farce about a colleen who strays into a "grace-and-favour" house at St. James's Palace and sets half the Brigade of Guards by the bushes. Plenty of good lines and situations, though appealing mainly to those familiar with "our little parish of St. James" and depending on highly polished playing. The same applies to *Count Your Blessings*, a characteristic Ronald Jeans piece about the efforts of the verminous classes to escape extermination. *Lace on Her Petticoat* takes place in "the living room of a cottage on the estate of the Marquis

of Rentoul on the West Coast of Scotland" in 1885 when "the attitude of the aristocrat towards class distinction was unrelenting." Mild intrigues which leaned heavily in the West End on the formidable char-r-rm of Sophie Stewart. Another West End success was *Travellers' Joy*, an unusually witty piece about the predicament of a group of English people in Stockholm who have spent their currency allowance; Yvonne Arnaud starred, but on a reading it seems a part that several other actresses could have played almost as well. And then there is R. F. Delderfield's marathon farce *Worm's Eye View*. There can scarcely be an adult member of the population who is not thoroughly familiar with the doings of this group of R.A.F. billetees during the war; amateurs will no doubt rush to put it on as one puts on a comfortable pair of old slippers.

A play which succeeded in London but which seemed to me to receive rather less than its due of critical praise is Dorothy and Campbell Christie's *His Excellency*, an admirably well-balanced and theatrically effective drama about what happens when an ex-docker is appointed Governor of the island of Salva.

Hitherto unacted, so far as one can see, is *The Commissioner's Bungalow*, by Ian Hay and John Smyth, about a dynamic Major-General trying to dispel apathy in Malaya at the time of the Japanese attack in 1942. Also apparently unseen in London is Agatha Christie's thriller *Black Coffee*, for which copyright was taken out in 1930 and which may have been re-issued now because it concerns the murder of a distinguished scientist and the theft of an atomic formula. And in complete contrast there is something called a "basic pantomime" of *Sinbad the Sailor*, by Pauline Stuart, which may well be of use to societies racking their brains to think of situations absurd enough for an annual panto.

PETER FORSTER

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Edward V. Hoile.

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Bradbury.

"*The Martin's Nest*," by Joan Morgan.
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Cupid and Psyche is fantastic comedy, very intellectual and very sophisticated. It is the sort of thing a highbrow group could offer as light relief from their usual programme of Ibsen, Anouilh, and Sartre without feeling that they were wasting their own or their audience's time.

John Jasper's Secret is based on "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" and the author believes it to be the first dramatization of Dickens' unfinished story since Comyns Carr's version produced by Tree at His Majesty's in 1908. The eerie tale of opium and murder is somewhat lacking in dramatic surprise, though John Jasper is a fine example of the cat-tearing villain of traditional melodrama. It would be difficult to stage; six sets are only the beginning of the producer's troubles.

Goddess and God is a play about Caesar and Cleopatra by the author of *Berkeley Square*. It covers the period from their first meeting to Caesar's assassination and is based on evidence, unknown to Shakespeare, that Cleopatra was in Rome at the time of his death and largely the cause of it. The writing is scholarly and dignified; but the blank verse is more careful than dramatic and has the flavour of literary debate rather than living dialogue.

Martyn Coleman has made a dramatisation of *Cranford* in which

Mrs. Gaskell herself acts as prologue to the acts, describing the scene and introducing the characters as the Stage Manager does in *Our Town*. The famous charm of the novel has been well caught; but a full length play with little substance is like making a meal entirely of meringues.

Escaping from the country in 1651 after the Civil War, Charles II comes to a farm called King's Way. It is inhabited by a group of unhealthily emotional women. They hide the King; but as this is an all-women play, all we are permitted to see of him is his hand appearing round the door.

On with the Motley is also an all-women play, and is described as a farcical comedy. The undisciplined cast of an amateur dramatic society are decoyed by their producer and imprisoned in a large country house for a week-end's intensive rehearsal on their Festival entry. Before long they find themselves running the place as a Nursing Home. A farcical situation certainly; but the characterisation and dialogue are so trite that the prevailing atmosphere is of sombre banality.

Love's a Luxury is entirely obvious and traditional. It pulls out with assurance every trick and gambit of the farcical-comedy including the wrong bedroom, mistaken identity, marital misunderstandings, a pedantic parson, and a female impersonation for a light comedian.

The Judgment of Harris is very simple and unsophisticated. The plot is built around a will even more outrageous than Portia's father's, the dialogue and characterisation are thin and the development hardly credible.

The Martin's Nest is a simple and unpretentious play about a suburban family. The characterisation is sound if not very profound and the theme is important. Mother brings her family near to disaster through her wrong-headed ambition for them; Dad, the moderating influence, is outvoted every time.

FRANK NEWMAN

ONE-ACT PLAYS GALORE

by F. Sladen-Smith

THIRTEEN years ago the present writer, reviewing for this magazine, called an article "A Spate of One-Act Plays." Since then the spate has become an avalanche—an Alice in Wonderland transformation, indeed! Festivals may show signs of decreasing; one-act plays give every evidence of increasing. Yet, apart from special occasions, the one-act is created by and for festivals. But if the many short plays written and published nowadays are to have a chance, there would have to be festivals every night from October to March, and even then, what guarantee is there of some of the plays being performed a sufficient number of times to bring any reward either to publisher or writer? They are written and published with some reward in view. Evidently publishers have proved, or still believe, that one successful play will pay for any amount of duds.

In any case, whatever reasons there may be for this avalanche, sheer merit is not the strongest. The amateur created the one-act play as we know it, and in so doing provided opportunity for some remarkable work—genuine classics of their kind. One looks in vain for such masterpieces now. This article is written after reading seventy-six one-act plays, and if it were asked are there any in this long list likely to prove outstanding examples of fine work in this particular medium, the answer would have to be, no. Some are undoubtedly good; most of them are competent, but not all; some are too feeble even for festivals—one shudders to think of the dismal occasions on which they may be used. Quite apart from originality, there seems to be a special value attached to newness alone. Here, some adjudicators are to blame. Often the writer has complained at festivals about the poor choice of play, and the answer has been, "What are we to do? Adjudicators sneer at old work and

tell us to do new plays. These are all we can find." There is a great deal in this. Both adjudicators and publishers are apt to under-estimate the intelligence and taste of the better type of amateur group.

Since the 1939 article some stalwarts are still writing, and new authors have arisen who are turning out many plays—actually, too many. Selection committees, on seeing a great number of plays by one writer, are more bewildered than impressed. Also, to return to adjudicators, there is sometimes more than a hint that it is considered rather disgraceful to have a number of popular plays to one's credit; there must be something bogus about them if they are so successful. However much this may apply to the general theatrical world, again it does the amateur less than justice. Those few writers who really have captured the amateur public have not achieved their success for nothing. It usually means that their work is more actable, more stimulating than the average depressing attempts. As an adjudicator, the writer, on seeing well-known names on a programme, has often experienced a feeling of relief. He knows that there is a distinct chance of being offered better fare than usual.

But this lowering of the standard is a serious thing for the amateur. Theoretically, there should not be any difficulty in selection committees choosing the highest when they read it. They are not supposed to be bound by box-office considerations. The amateur's boast was that he was free from the shackles and financial problems which beset the professional world, but nowadays the box-office is the bane of many an excellent society, and the general trend of modern one-acts, with their pathetic attempts to please both adjudicators and audiences and to avoid anything which might

offend or possibly be a flop, is an indication that now the amateur world has become the accepted thing and a feature in the lives of thousands, it has taken to itself difficulties and problems which the pioneers hoped would never arise.

Space forbids further discussion of these matters; it is time to consider some of the plays which stand out in this long list. And once one has separated the wheat from the chaff, the task becomes lighter, more promising. One of the best in the batch, in this writer's opinion, is *The Spice of Life*, by Fredrick Lidstone (12 m. 3 f., French, 1s. 6d.), although it is only for experienced casts. The celebrated star, Lottie Green, comes to a Monday rehearsal to try out a new number. Her first marriage with Bill Foster ending in divorce, she is engaged to the wealthy Harry Templeton, who, discovering that Foster is now a stage hand at the theatre, magnanimously sends Lottie to him. The atmosphere of the Music Halls of 1912 is remarkably well captured, and, competently acted, the play is bound to be effective. After this, it is a mixed bag. In Philip Johnson's *The Little Dark Cupboard* (3 m. 2 f., French, 2s.), a husband and wife, lost in a fog on Dartmoor, take refuge in an apparently deserted house. An escaping convict appears whom the wife recognises as a gardener who once rescued her from a dark cupboard. In gratitude she insists that he is allowed to leave in safety. The arrival of a policeman who makes a grim discovery brings the play to a striking conclusion. Another prolific writer, T. B. Morris (who can be relied upon to try any style several times), has an amusing medieval frolic, *The Tail of Fire* (3 m. 4 f., French, 1s. 6d.). Jack Chewberry and Jill Nonsuch are put in the stocks by their irate parents, but, thanks to the confusion caused by a comet, they not only escape, but are able to put their parents in the stocks while they are married. The verse suggests that Christopher Fry is round the corner.

There is an excellent Scottish play (with glossary for the ignorant Sassenach) *Nae Luck About the House*, by Hugh Miller (4 m. 5 f., French 1s. 6d.). Many things are happening in a farmhouse in the Lowlands in 1715; a baby is about to be born, a Grandfather seems about to die, and there is a hint of the supernatural in Aggie, a tinker woman. The farmer not only feels bewitched, but dreads the advent of one more daughter. But all is well; it is a case of twins, one of them a boy, and Aggie departs with the Minister as strangely as she came. The Irish play, *Ned's Twins*, by A. W. Futter (3 m. 2 f., Carter Publications, Belfast, 1s. 9d.), is not so good. Doubtless an Englishman can hardly appreciate the idiom, but a shallow story of two men courting two wealthy spinsters seems slight material for three scenes. Some of the plays are little more than dramatised incidents. Two of the best of these are *Tea with a Legend*, by Norman Holland (3 m. 4 f., French 1s. 6d.)—four young psychology students visit Lord Bernard Pleymell, an ancient but impecunious poet—and *Portrait of a Mother*, by Alfred Emmet and Barbara Hutchins (2 m. 2 f., Garnet Miller, 2s. 6d.). Caterina, a peasant woman, meets Leonardo da Vinci, whom she knows to be her illegitimate son. Content with his achievements, she does not divulge her secret. Although very different, in both the characterisation is excellent.

There are many plays for women in the list, and, on the whole, they are better than usual, especially the thrillers. There is the Victorian drama, *The Bell*, by N. M. Carroll (5 f., Deane, 1s. 6d.), for instance. The arrogant Mrs. Victoria Hanson is living in a large house with only her daughter and the maid, who gives notice, terrified by an old man who, when the bell rings, tries to get in at the window. We learn that Mrs. Hanson's devoted servant, Stephen, when dying vowed that if he heard "Miss Vicky's bell" he would answer it. Alone in the house Mrs. Hanson rings the bell. The curtain falls

to footsteps on the stairs and a gentle knocking at the door. Rather different is *Sunset for Hugo*, by Terence Bowen (6 f., French, 1s. 6d.). Three women were in love with Hugo, whose tyrannical mother holds a festival in his untouched study on the anniversary of his death. Cousin Harriet, Zane,

Hugo's sprightly widow, and Alice, once a maid at the hall, all contribute to an effective situation. There are, of course, comedies of all kinds, including a neat sketch by Cyril Roberts, *Progress On the Whole Satisfactory* (French, 1s. 6d.), of nine likeable women on the staff of a Girl's High School.

SYNOPSIS OF OTHER ONE-ACT PLAYS

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"Up the Troupers," by Neil Grant. (2 m., 2 f.). Two young walkers meet Carl Fancourt and Beryl Malmaison from a home for elderly stage folk. Their little vanities, deceptions, and innate loneliness are in pathetic contrast to the buoyancy and hope of the young couple.

"Isabella, Friend of Columbus," by T. B. Morris. (3 m., 6 f.)

A picture of the court of Isabella of Castile, a glimpse of Christopher Columbus. Little plot but competent writing.

"First Glean," by Frederick Lidstone. (3 m., 3 f.) Deals with Elizabeth Fry's first visit to Newgate. A sombre drama, with clear pictures of Elizabeth, the Governor, and a condemned prisoner.

"Pavel the Fox," by Norman Holland. (2 m., 4 f.)

Conrad, hiding from the police, is living in the country with the peasant Pavel, his wife Bryna, and daughter Etta. He plans to rob Pavel and return to the city. His plans are overheard by Pavel who lures Conrad to the cellar and murders him, only to discover that Conrad has betrayed Etta.

"Judgment Here," by Norman Holland. (1 m., 4 f.)

Paul Edison's wife, Madeline, has been looked after devotedly by an adventuress turned housekeeper, who, having discovered that Paul has poisoned Madeline, uses this knowledge to force him to marry her.

"Roots go Deep," by L. du Garde Peach. (2 m., 2 f.)

A study of farm and hall life. Eleanor, Countess of Ashdale wants the farm run by the Sheldon family for 250 years, for her son. Will Sheldon quickly proves who is the real Lord Ashdale, but family traditions make for a peaceful solution.

"Do not Disturb," by Cecil Roberts. (2 m., 2 f.)

A young and attractive widow, is visited by an old flame who proposes, again unsuccessfully. A not-unfamiliar situation, treated sensibly.

"High Tea," by Hugh Miller. (4 m., 5 f.)

Introduces us to an unsuccessful actor and his household. His son possesses a highly stimulating Japanese drug, which the daughter drops into the teapot with exuberant results.

"Miss Matty's Love Affair," by Harold Simpson. (1 m., 5 f.)

The one romance of Miss Matty's life is beautifully sketched for us in "Cranford," and from this has been constructed a little play which contains some of the charm of the original story.

"The Star and the Shadow," by Stefanie Fone. (9 m., 3 f.)

A better Nativity play than most. The verse has distinction, there is a sense of characterisation, and originality.

Deane, 1/6 each

"The Beast has Claws," by Edward Rees. (5 m., 1 f.)

May, a woman tramp, has left the brutal Fred Duncan for the weak-willed Pete, and together they meet an escaped convict. May insists on helping him, but later, when, during a fight between Fred and Pete, Fred is accidentally killed, she lays the blame on the convict who has just been re-arrested.

"Things that go Bump," by Edward Murch. (3 m., 3 f.)

During the Napoleonic wars, a Captain and his batman arrive at a lonely inn in Devonshire. Obligated to sleep in the living-room, they are horrified to discover in an oak chest the body of an old man. The explanation is macabre and amusing.

"High Tide at Whitehall," by C. Denison Smith. (4 m., 2 f.)

Citizens of the time of Charles II are landed from the Thames by the drunken waterman on the steps of Whitehall. Among them is Nell Gwynn, whose ambition to enter the Palace at last is firmly resisted by the King when he returns from his morning swim. Attractive comedy.

"She Shall Dance at the Opera," by Edward Rutherford. (2 m., 2 f.)

The Duchesse de Noailles and her daughter Maxine are living in comparative safety during the Revolution, thanks to a mysterious "Monsieur Paul," whom the Duchesse once turned out of her house because of democratic sympathies. He has changed his views, and when her mother forbids Maxine to dance at the Opera with a shop boy, offers to take her before giving himself up. In the last lines the Duchesse reveals that he is her son.

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"A Present for a Lady," by Philip Johnson. (5 f.)

Laura, bored with her prosaic marriage, receives, on her silver-wedding day, a bracelet from an old flame, Sir Gerald Meredith, with an invitation to lunch. Laura discovers that the bracelet and invitation were intended for another woman; Sir George has only sent one more butter dish. Good dialogue.

"The Respectable Terrace," by T. B. Morris. (8 f.)

Two women are a mystery to the other residents of a boarding house, but they find out that one of them, who is about to die, has been tried for the murder of her husband, but was acquitted. After her death, it appears that it was her companion who was the murderess; the invalid, realising that she was a dying woman, had insisted on the change of identity.

"Queen's Pawn," by L. du Garde Peach. (5 f.)

The young Elizabeth, in the Tower, outwits the tyrant, Mary Tudor, by skill and also by taking considerable risks.

"Festival," by Cecil Roberts. (5 f.)

A slight, but amusing picture of the women's dressing-room below stage at a drama festival.

"Miaow! Miaow!" by R. F. Delderfield. (7 f.)

Miss Sprigge has inherited a house—with cat—in a large town. The cat is run over, but Hannah, the maid, convinces everyone that it died through eating tinned crab from which tasty sandwiches have been made. The play ends with the flight of Miss Sprigge and the triumphant Hannah back to the country.

Deane, 1s. 6d.

"Who Steals my Purse," by Adelaide Heriot. (9 f.)

Iris Welldon, starting at a factory, finds that Ada Trindle (once instrumental in sending her to prison for stealing) is the forewoman. In revenge, she puts a pair of nylons belonging to a worker in Miss Trindle's bag. All ends fairly well, but not before a tense little drama has developed.

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"The Claw," by Molly Raynor. (5 f.)

Mrs. Fields, trying to sell her country house, is unaware that it contains a secret cellar stacked with priceless pottery. But two women crooks are well aware of this, and also of a sliding panel which leads to the cellar. Amusing comedy-thriller.

"Wedding Morning," by Gerald Anstruther. (8 f.)

Wedding dresses have a habit of not arriving in one-act plays. This time the dress is at the bottom of a river. Calamity is softened by the discovery that there could not have been a wedding in any case because the church is on fire.

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